UNIV. OF CALIF. LIBRARY, LOS ANGEL

## POPULAR NOVELS.

# BY MAY AGNES FLEMING.

1.—GUY EARLSCOURT'S WIFE.
2.—A WONDERFUL WOMAN.
3.—A TERRIBLE SECRET.
4.—NORINE'S REVENGE.
5.—A MAD MARRIAGE.
6.—ONE NIGHT'S MYSTERY.
7.—KATE DANTON.
8.—SILENT AND TRUE.
9.—HEIR OF CHARLTON.
10.—CARRIED BY STORM.
11.—LOST FOR A WOMAN.
12.—A WIFE'S TRAGEDY.
13.—A CHANGED HEART.
14.—PRIDE AND PASSION.
15.—SHARING HER CRIME.
16.—A WRONGED WIFE.
17.—MAUDE PERCY'S SECRET (*New*).

"Mrs. Fleming's stories are growing more and more popular every day. Their delineations of character, life-like conversations, flashes of wit, constantly varying scenes, and deeply interesting plots, combine to place their author in the very first rank of Modern Novelists."

All published uniform with this volume. Price, $1.50 each, and sent *free* by mail on receipt of price.

BY

**G. W. CARLETON & CO., Publishers,**
**New York.**

A

# WONDERFUL WOMAN.

## A Novel.

BY

MAY AGNES FLEMING,

AUTHOR OF

"GUY EARLSCOURT'S WIFE," "A TERRIBLE SECRET," ETC., ETC., ETC.

NEW YORK:

*G. W. Carleton & Co., Publishers.*

LONDON: S. LOW SON & CO.

MDCCCLXXXIV.

1884

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1873, by
G. W. CARLETON & CO.,
in the Office of the Librarian of Congress, at Washington.

TROW'S
PRINTING AND BOOKBINDING CO.,
PRINTERS,
205-213 *East 12th St.*,
NEW YORK.

To My Friend,

SARA HAMILTON LEMON,

In Memory of the Pleasant Winter Afternoons Spent Together

WHILST IT WAS BEING WRITTEN,

THIS BOOK IS AFFECTIONATELY

DEDICATED.

2129503

# CONTENTS.

—:o:—


| CHAPTER | | PAGE |
|---|---|---|
| I. | —Katherine | 9 |
| II. | —Mrs. Vavasor | 22 |
| III. | —Among the Roses | 36 |
| IV. | —Love under the Lamps | 43 |
| V. | —Before Breakfast | 47 |
| VI. | —Asking in Marriage | 56 |
| VII. | —The Second Warning | 65 |
| VIII. | —A Letter from New Orleans | 81 |
| IX. | —The Third Warning | 91 |
| X. | —Before the Wedding | 104 |
| XI. | —The Wedding Night | 123 |
| XII. | —The Telling of the Secret | 136 |
| XIII. | —Mrs. Vavasor's Story | 144 |
| XIV. | —Day of Wrath! Day of Grief! | 154 |
| XV. | —"Dead or Alive" | 166 |
| XVI. | —Before Midnight | 179 |
| XVII. | —"Resurgam" | 192 |


## PART II.

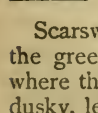

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| I. | —La Reine Blanche | 207 |
| II. | —Miss Herncastle | 221 |
| III. | —Sir Arthur Tregenna | 235 |
| IV. | —At Scarswood | 240 |
| V. | —"Once more the Gate behind me falls" | 253 |
| VI. | —Something very strange | 262 |
| VII. | —"There is many a Slip," etc | 272 |

| CHAPTER | | PAGE |
|---|---|---|
| VIII. | —Redmond O'Donnell | 282 |
| IX. | —Six Years before | 292 |
| X. | —An Irish Idyl | 300 |
| XI. | —Its English Reading | 314 |
| XII. | —"The Battle of Fontenoy" | 326 |
| XIII. | —The Mystery of Bracken Hollow | 337 |
| XIV. | —Under the King's Oak | 353 |
| XV. | —"As in a Glass, darkly" | 362 |
| XVI. | —The Story of the Ivory Miniature | 377 |
| XVII. | —The Scar on the Temple | 391 |
| XVIII. | —Rose O'Donnell's Secret | 403 |
| XIX. | —Knight and Page | 416 |
| XX. | —A Dark Night's Work | 432 |
| XXI. | —The Length of his Tether | 437 |
| XXII. | —After the Masquerade | 445 |
| XXIII. | —"Six Years too Late" | 457 |
| XXIV. | —A Chapter of Wonders | 474 |
| XXV. | —The Last Link | 487 |
| XXVI. | —Hunted Down | 497 |
| XXVII. | —That Night | 509 |
| XXVIII. | —"Not I, but Fate, hath dealt this Blow" | 524 |
| XXIX. | —How it ended | 533 |

# A WONDERFUL WOMAN

## CHAPTER I.

### KATHERINE.



HE large, loud-voiced clock over the stables struck nine, and announced to all whom it might concern that the breakfast-hour of Sir John Dangerfield, Baronet, of Scarswood Park, Sussex, had arrived.

Scarswood Park! A glorious old place, lying deep down in the green heart of a Sussex woodland! A glorious old place, where the rare red deer disported amid the emerald glades, and dusky, leafy aisles of the oak and beech! A vast and stately park, sloping down to the tawny sea-shore, and a vast and stately mansion, its echoing turrets rising high above the towering oak and copper beeches, and its eastern windows sparkling in the red sunlight of this bright September morning like sparks of fire!

Within and without the great house was very still; a breakfast-table, sparkling with crystal, rich with rough old silver, gay with tall glasses of September roses, and snowy with napery, stood ready and waiting in a spacious room.

Through the open windows the sweet, hay-scented morning wind blew, and far off you caught in the summer stillness the soft wash of the waves on the yellow sands, more than a mile away.

At the last chime of the loud-voiced clock the door opened, and Sir John Dangerfield came into the room. A silver-toned French time-piece on the marble mantel began a tinkling waltz, preparatory to repeating the hour; the birds, in their gilded cages, sang blithely their welcome; but the baronet glanced impatiently around in search of something or somebody else.

"Not down yet," he said. "That's not like Katherine!

She is not used to dissipation, and I suppose last night's concert has made her lazy this morning. Thomas,"—to a footman, appearing like a tall plush specter in the doorway—"tell Miss Katherine's maid that I am waiting breakfast. Has the *Times* arrived?"

"Yes, Sir John."

Thomas presented the folded Thunderer to his master, and vanished.

Sir John Dangerfield flung himself into an easy-chair, that groaned in every joint with his three hundred pounds of manhood, and opened the damp London paper, perfuming the room with the smell of printers' ink. He was a tall, portly gentleman, this Sussex baronet, with a handsome, florid face, and an upright, military bearing. For three months only had he reigned master of Scarswood; three lives had stood between him and the baronetcy, and, a colonel in the Honorable East India Company's Service, he had, four months before this sunny September morning, about as much idea of ever lording it in Scarswood Hall as he had of ever sitting on the throne of England. Suddenly, and as if a fatality were at work, these three lives had been removed, and Colonel Dangerfield, of her Majesty's H. E. I. C. S., became Sir John Dangerfield, of Scarswood Park, and, with his daughter and heiress, came back to England for the first time in fifteen years. He was a widower, and Miss Dangerfield, his daughter, his heiress, his idol, had been born in England, and was two years old when her father had first gone out to India, and grown up to be nearly seventeen before she ever set foot upon English soil again.

He unfolded his paper, but he did not read. The loud singing of the birds, the dazzling brightness of the summer morning, disturbed him, perhaps. It dropped on his knee, and his eyes turned on the emerald lawn, on the tangled depths of fern and bracken, on the dark expanse of waving woodland—terrace, lawn, and coppice, all bathed in the glorious golden light.

"A fair prospect," he said—"a princely inheritance! And to think that four months ago I was grilling alive in Calcutta, with no earthly hope but that of retiring one day from the Company's service with chronic liver complaint, and a colonel's half-pay. For myself it would not matter: but for Katherine!" His face changed suddenly. "If I only could be certain *she* were dead! If I only could be certain my secret was buried with her! It never mattered before—we were out of her reach; but since my accession to Scarswood, since my return to Eng-

land, that wretch's memory has haunted me like an evil spirit. Only last night I dreamed of her—dreamed I saw her evil black eyes gleaming upon me in this room. Paugh!"

A shudder of disgust—a look of abhorrence; then he lifted the paper again—and again he dropped it.

A door far above closed with a bang; a fresh young voice caroling like a bird; the quick patter, patter, patter, of little female feet downstairs—the last three cleared with a jump; and then the door of the breakfast-room was flung wide, and the heiress of Scarswood Park flashed into the room.

Flashed—I use the word advisedly—flashed in like a burst of sunshine—like a hillside breeze—and stood before her father in fluttering white muslin, pink ribbons waving, brown hair flying, gray eyes dancing, and her fresh, sweet voice ringing through the room.

"Good morning, papa!" Miss Dangerfield cried, panting, and out of breath. "Is breakfast ready? I'm perfectly famished, and would have starved to death in bed if Ninon had not come and routed me out. And how is *your* appetite, papa?—and I hope I have not kept you waiting too long—and, oh! wasn't the concert perfectly de—licious last night!"

And then two white arms went impetuously around the neck of the Indian officer, and two fresh rosy lips gave him a kiss that exploded like a torpedo.

Sir John disengaged himself laughingly from this impulsive embrace.

"Gently, gently, Kathie! don't quite garrote me with those long arms of yours. Stand off and let me see how you look after last night's dissipation. A perfect wreck, I'll be bound."

"Dissipation! A perfect wreck! Oh, papa, it was heavenly—just that! I shall never forget that tenor singer—who sang Fortunio's song, you know, papa, with his splendid eyes, and the face of a Greek god. And his name—Gaston Dantree—beautiful as himself. Don't talk to me of dissipation and a wreck; I mean to go again to-night, and to-morrow night, and all the to-morrow nights while those concerts are given by the Talbots."

She stood before him, gesticulating rapidly, with the golden morning light pouring full on her face.

And Miss Katherine Dangerfield, heiress and heroine, was beautiful, you say, as an heiress and heroine should be? I am sorry to say *No*. The young ladies of the neighborhood, otherwise English misses with pink and white complexions, and per

fect manners, would have told you Katherine Dangerfield was lanky and overgrown, had sunburnt hands and complexion, too small a nose, and too large a mouth and chin. Would have told you her forehead was low, her complexion sallow, and her manners perfectly horrible. She was boisterous, she was a hoyden, she said whatever came uppermost in her mind, was utterly spoiled by a doting father, and had the temper of a very termagant. They would probably have forgotten to mention—those young ladies—that the sallow complexion was lit by a pair of loveliest dark-gray eyes, that the tall, supple figure of the girl of seventeen gave rare promise of stately and majestic womanhood, that the ever-ready smile, which parted the rosy lips, displayed a set of teeth flashing like jewels.

They would have forgotten to mention the wonderful fall of bright brown hair, dark in the shadow, red gold in the light, and the sweet freshness of a voice so silver-toned that all who heard it paused to listen. Not handsome—you would never have called her that—but bright, bright and blithe as the summer sunshine itself.

"Well, papa, and how do I look? Not very much uglier than usual, I hope. Oh, papa," the girl cried, suddenly, clasping her hands, "why, why, *why* wasn't I born handsome? I adore beauty—pictures, music, sunshine, flowers, and—handsome men! I hate women—I hate girls—vain, malicious magpies—spiteful and spiritless. Why don't I look like you, papa, —you handsome, splendid old soldier! Why was I born with a yellow skin, an angular figure, and more arms and hands than I ever know what to do with? Whom do I take after to be so ugly, papa? Not after you, that's clear. Then it must be after mamma?"

Miss Dangerfield had danced over to the great mirror on the mantel, and stood gazing discontentedly at her own image in the glass.

Sir John, in his sunny window-seat, had been listening with an indulgent smile, folding his crackling paper. The crackling suddenly ceased at his daughter's last words, the smile died wholly away.

"Say, papa," Katherine cried, impatiently, "do I look like mamma? I never saw her, you know, nor her picture, nor anything. If I do, you couldn't have been over and above particular during the period of love's young dream. Do I inherit my tawny complexion, and square chin, and snub nose, and low forehead from the late Mrs. Colonel Dangerfield?"

Her father laid down his paper, and arose.

"Come to breakfast, Katherine," he said, more coldly than he had ever spoken to her before in his life, "and be kind enough to drop the subject. Your flippant manner of speaking of—of your mother, is positively shocking. I am afraid it is true what they say of you here—Indian nurses—the lack of a mother's care—and my indulgence, have spoiled you."

"Very well, papa; then the fault's yours and you shouldn't blame *me*. The what's-his-name cannot change his spots, and I can't change my irreverent nature any more than I can my looks. But really and truly, papa, *do* I look like mamma?"

"No—yes—I don't know."

"No—yes—I don't know. Intelligible, perhaps, but not at all satisfactory. When *I* am left a widow, I hope I shall remember how the dear departed partner of my existence looked, even after thirteen years. Have you no portrait of mamma, then?"

"No! In Heaven's name, Katherine, eat your breakfast, and let me eat mine!"

"I am eating my breakfast," responded his daughter, testily. "I suppose a person can talk and eat at the same time. Haven't you rather got a pain in your temper this morning papa? And I must say I think it a little too hard that I can't be told who I take my ugliness from. I'm much obliged to them for the inheritance, whoever they were."

Sir John again laid down his paper with a resigned sigh. He knew of old how useless it was to try and stem the torrent of his daughter's eloquence.

"What nonsense you talk, my dear," he said. "You're not ugly—you don't want your father to pay you compliments, do you, Katherine? I thought your cousin Peter paid you enough last night to satisfy even your vanity for a month."

Katherine shook her head impatiently until all its red-brown tresses flashed again.

"Peter Dangerfield—wretched little bore! Yes, *he* paid me compliments, with his hideous little weasen face close to my ear until I told him for goodness sake to hold his tongue, and not drive me frantic with his idiotic remarks! He let me alone after that, and sulked! I tell you what it is, papa—if something is not done to prevent him, that little grinning imbecile will be asking me to marry him one of these days—mark my words!"

"Very well—suppose he does?" The baronet leaned back

in his chair and raised his paper nervously before his face. "Suppose he does, Kathie—what then?"

"What then!" The young lady could but just repeat the words in her amaze and indignation. "What then! Sir John Dangerfield—do you mean to insult me, sir? Put down that paper this instant, and look the person you're talking to full in the face, and repeat '*what then*,' if you dare!"

"Well, Kathie," the baronet said, still fidgeting with his paper screen and *not* looking his excited little commanding officer in the face, "Peter's not handsome, I know, nor dashing, but he's a clever little fellow, and my nephew, and in love with you, and will make you a much better husband, my dear, than a much better-looking man. Handsome men are always vain as peacocks, and so deeply in love with themselves that they never have room in their conceited hearts and empty heads to love any one else. Don't be romantic, my dear—you'll not find heroes anywhere now except in Mudie's novels. Peter's a clever little fellow, as I said, and over head and ears in love with you."

"A clever little fellow! A clever *little* fellow," repeated Miss Dangerfield, with intense concentrated scorn. "Papa," with dignity, "a few minutes ago you told me to change the subject. *I* make the same remark now. I wouldn't marry your clever little fellow not to save my own head from the gallows or his soul from perdition. Sir John, I consider myself doubly insulted this morning! I don't wonder you sit there excruciating my nerves with that horrid rattling paper and ashamed to look me in the face. I think you have reason to be ashamed! Telling your only child and heiress she couldn't do better than throw herself away on a pitiful little country lawyer, only five feet high, and with the countenance of a rat. If it were that adorable Gaston Dantree now. Oh, here's the post. Papa! papa! give me the key."

Miss Dangerfield forgetting in a second the late outrage offered her by her cruel parent seized the key, unlocked the bag, and plunged in after its contents.

"One—two—three—four! two for me from India—one for you from ditto, in Major Trevanion's big slap-dash fist, and this —Why, papa, what lady correspondent can *you* have in Paris? What an elegant Italian hand! what thick yellow perfumed paper, and what a sentimental seal and motto! Blue wax and '*pensez à moi*.' Now, papa, who *can* this be from?"

She threw the letter across the table. With her first words

the face of the Indian officer had changed—a hunted look of absolute terror had come into his face.

His hands tightened over the paper, his eyes fixed themselves upon the dainty missive his daughter held before them, his florid, healthful color faded—a dull grayish whiteness crept over his face from brow to chin.

"Papa!" Katherine cried, "you're sick, you're going to have a fit! Don't tell me! can't I see it? Drink this—drink it this moment and come round!"

She held a glass of water to his lips. He obeyed mechanically, and the color that had faded and fled, slowly crept back to his bearded, sun-browned face. "There!" said Miss Dangerfield, in a satisfied tone, "you *have* come round! And now tell me, was it a fit, or was it the letter? Tell me the truth, sir; don't prevaricate!"

"It was one of my old attacks, Kathie, nothing more. You ought to be used to them by this time. Nothing more, I give you my word. Go back to your breakfast, child," he said testily, "and don't stand staring there in that uncomfortable way!"

"My opinion is, papa," responded Miss Dangerfield, with gravity, "that you're in a bad way and should turn your attention immediately from the roast beef of old England to water gruel and weak tea. A fine old English gentleman of your time of day, who has left his liver behind him in India, and who has a Sepoy bullet lodged for life in his left lung, and a strong tendency to apoplexy besides, ought to mind what he eats and drinks, and be on very friendly terms with the nearest clergymen. Aren't you going to read that letter, papa, and tell me who the woman is who has the presumption to write to you without *my* knowledge? Now where are you going?" For Sir John had arisen hastily, his letters in his hand.

"To my study, Kathie. Finish your breakfast, darling, and don't mind me." He stooped down suddenly and kissed her, with almost passionate tenderness. "My darling! my darling!" he said. "Heaven bless and keep you always, whatever happens—whatever happens."

He repeated the last words with a sort of anguish in his voice, then turned and walked out of the breakfast parlor before his very much amazed daughter could speak.

"Well!" exclaimed Miss Dangerfield at last, "this does cap the universe, doesn't it?" This question being addressed to vacancy received no reply. "There's a mystery here, and I don't like mysteries out of sensation novels. I have no secrets

from papa—what business has papa to have secrets from me?"

She arose with an injured air, gave the bell a vicious pull, and walked in offended dignity back to her room. The broad, black, slippery oaken staircase went up in majestic sweeps to the regions above. Miss Dangerfield ascended it slowly and with a face of perplexed thought.

"It was never an attack—don't tell me—it was that nasty, vicious, spidery written little letter! Now what woman wrote that letter, and what business had she to write it? I shall insist upon papa giving me a full explanation at dinner-time. No woman in Paris or any other wicked city shall badger my precious old soldier into an early grave. And meantime I shall have a gallop on Ilderim over the golden Sussex downs."

She entered her room singing the song the handsome tenor had sung at the concert the night before, the melody of whose silver voice, the dusky fire of whose eyes, the dark foreign beauty of whose face, had haunted her romantic seventeen-year-old mind ever since.

"Rispondia a chi t' implora!
Rispondia a cara a me!"

"How handsome he was, how handsome—how handsome! If ever I marry, it shall be a man—a demi-god like that. Peter Dangerfield, indeed! Nasty little bore! Still I would rather have him in love with me than have no one at all. I wonder if it is I, myself, he loves, or Scarswood Park, and the heiress of eight thousand a year. Ninon! my green riding-habit, and tell them to fetch Ilderim around. And oh, Ninon, my child, tell that tiresome groom I *don't* want him perambulating behind me, like an apoplectic shadow. Ilderim and I can take care of ourselves."

"But, mademoiselle—Seer John's orders—"

"Ninon Duclos, will you do as *I* order you? I won't have the groom—there! I'm always shocking the resident gentry of this neighborhood, and I mean to go on shocking them. I feel as if I had a spy at my heels while that beef-eating groom is there. Help me on with my habit and say no more about it."

Little Ninon knew a good deal better than to dispute Miss Dangerfield's mood when Miss Dangerfield spoke in *that* tone. Miss Dangerfield had boxed her ears before now, and was very capable of doing it again. Perhaps, on the whole, smart little Ninon rather liked having her ears impetuously slapped by her

impulsive young mistress, and the tingling cured, as it invariably was, by the present of Miss Katherine's second-best silk dress half-an-hour after.

Looking very bright and dashing, if not in the least pretty, the heiress of Scarswood Park ran lightly down the slippery stairs, out of the vast vaulted hall, where statues gleamed and suits of mail worn by dead-and-gone Dangerfields centuries before, flashed back the sunshine. Her dark-green riding-habit fitted her, as Katherine herself said, "as though she had been born in it,"—the waving brightness of her brown hair was twined in thick plaits aronnd her graceful head, and her pork-pie hat with its scarlet bird's-wing perched ever so little on one side, set off the piquante face beneath—a thoroughly English face, despite the golden hue of a tropic sun.

"I beg your parding, miss," Roberts, the butler, said, stepping forward. He was a dignified, elderly, clerical-looking personage, like an archbishop in silk stockings and knee breeches; "but if you will hexcuse the remark, miss, I thinks as ow we're going to 'ave a storm. There's that closeness in the hair, miss, and that happearance in the hatmosphere that halways perceeds a thunder-storm; if I might make so bold miss, I should hadvise you not to stay hout more than a hour, at the furthest."

"Good gracious, Roberts, what nonsense! There's not a cloud in the sky. Oh, well! that one! why it's no bigger than my hand. I'm going to Castleford, and I don't believe in your thunder-storms."

"You'll catch it, though, for all that, my young lady," soliloquized Mr. Roberts, looking after the slight girlish figure as it dashed out of sight down the elm avenue mounted on a spirited black horse. "Great storms 'ave come from clouds no bigger than a man's 'and before now. But you're a young persing that won't be hadvised, and you'll come to grief one of these days through 'aving too much of your own way, as sure as my name's Roberts."

And then Mr. Roberts philosophically went back to the *Castleford Chronicle*, and never dreamed that he had uttered a prophecy.

Miss Dangerfield dashed away over the breezy Sussex downs —gold-green in the September sunshine. But the brilliance of that sunlight grew dim and dimmer with every passing moment, and looking up presently she saw that her "cloud no bigger than a man's hand" had spread and darkened, and was fast glooming over the whole sky. Old Roberts had been right then,

after all; and unless she stayed at Castleford, or turned back at once, she was in for a drenching.

"I *won't* turn back and I *won't* stop at Castleford," the baronet's daughter said, setting her white teeth. "I'll get my books, and I'll go home, and Ilderim and I shall outstrip the lightning after all."

She dashed into the town. Castleford was a military depot, and knots of red-coated officers grouped here and there, lowered their crests, and gazed after her with admiring eyes as she flew by.

"Plucky girl that," said Captain Vere de Vere of the Plungers Purple to his friend Captain Howard of the Bobtails Blue. "Gad! how squarely she sits her saddle. And what a waltzer she is—as graceful as a Parisienne ballerina, and as springy. Comfortable thing there waiting for some lucky beggar—clear eight thousand a year, and strictly entailed. Not a handsome girl, I admit, but what would you? Doosidly clever, too, and *that's* a drawback. I hate your clever, women—put a fellow out of countenance, by Jove! Shouldn't know anything—women shouldn't, beyond the three great feminine arts, dancing, dressing, and looking pretty." With which terse summary of women duties the Honorable Plantagenet Vere de Vere lit his huge manilla and sauntered away. "She seemed uncommonly sweet on that foreigner, that Creole fellow—what's his name—at the concert last night," he thought. "It's always fellows like that—with tenor voices and long eyelashes, that draw the matrimonial prizes. Heard her tell Edith Talbot last night all the officers at Castleford had ginger whiskers, and knew no more how to waltz than so many lively young elephants."

Miss Dangerfield's errand was to a Castleford bookseller's, and her order was for *all* the newest novels. She came out presently, followed by the obsequious shopman carrying her parcel and bowing his thanks. The storm was very near now. The whole sky was dark—there was that oppressive heat and stillness in the air that usually precedes a thunder-storm.

"Coming!" Miss Dangerfield thought, vaulting into her saddle. "Now then, Ilderim, my beauty, my darling, outstrip the storm if you can!"

She was off like the wind, and in a few minutes the town lay far behind her. But fate had decreed to take sides with Roberts.

On the bare downs, treeless and houseless, the lightning leaped out like a two-edged sword. There came the booming

crash of thunder, then a deluge of rain, and the mid-day summer tempest was upon her in its might. The swift, sudden blaze of the lightning in his eyes startled the nervous system of Ilderim. He tossed his little black Arabian head in the air with a snort of terror, made a bound forward and fled over the grassy plains with the speed of an express train.

"A runaway, by Jove!"

A man darted forward with the cry upon his lips, and made the agile spring of a wild-cat at Ilderim's bridle rein. A moment's struggle and then the spirited Arab stood still under the grasp of an iron hand, quivering in every limb, and his mistress, looking down from her saddle, met full two of the most beautiful eyes into which it had ever been her good fortune to look.

It was Mr. Gaston Dantree, the handsome, silver-voiced tenor of last night's concert, and a flash of glad surprise lit up her face.

"Mr. Dantree!" she cried, "you! and in this tempest, and at so opportune a moment. How shall I thank you for save—for rendering me such very timely assistance?"

"For saving my life," she had been going to say, but *that* would have been coming it a little too strong. Her life had not been in the smallest danger—she was a thorough horsewoman, and could have managed a much wilder animal than Ilderim. But the knight to the rescue was Mr. Dantree, and last night Miss Dangerfield had looked for the first time into those wondrous eyes of gold-brown light and fallen straight in love with their owner.

He was very handsome; perfectly, faultlessly handsome, with an olive complexion, a low forehead, a chiselled nose, a thick black mustache, and two dark almond eyes, of "liquid light." Not tall, not stout, not very manly-looking, perhaps, in any way, men were rather given to sneer at Mr. Gaston Dantree's somewhat effeminate beauty. But they never sneered long. There was that in Mr. Dantree's black eyes, in Mr. Dantree's musical voice, in Mr. Dantree's trained muscles, that would have rendered a serious difficulty a little unpleasant. He took off his hat now, despite the pouring rain, and stood before the heiress of Scarswood, looking like the Apollo himself in a shabby shooting jacket.

"You do me too much honor, Miss Dangerfield; I don't really think your life was in any danger—still it's pleasant to know *I* was the one to stop your black steed all the same. Rather

a coincidence, by the bye, that I should meet you here just at present, as, taking advantage of last night's kind invitation, I was about to present myself at Scarswood."

"And Scarswood is very well worth seeing, I assure you. As it is not more than a quarter of a mile to the gates, suppose you resume your hat and your journey?"

"But, Miss Dangerfield, you will get your death at this pace in this downpour."

"Oh, no, I'll not," Katherine answered coolly. "The rain will never fall that will give me my death! You don't know how strong I am. Come, Mr. Dantree, let me see if you can walk as fast as Ilderim."

She looked down at him with that brilliant smile that lit her dark face into something brighter than beauty.

"Come, Mr. Dantree," she repeated, "let me be cicerone for once, and show you the splendors of Scarswood. It is *the* show place of the neighborhood, you know, built by a Dangerfield, I am afraid to say how many centuries ago. We came over with William, the what's-his-name, you know, or, perhaps, William found us here when he arrived; I'm not positive which. We're a dreadfully old family, indeed, and I'm the last daughter of the race; and I wouldn't be anybody but Katherine Dangerfield, of Scarswood Park, for the world!"

She dashed under the huge stone arch of masonry as she spoke, half laughing, wholly in earnest. She *was* proud of the old blood that flowed so spiritedly in her veins, of this noble mansion, of the princely inheritance which was her birthright.

"Welcome to Scarswood, Mr. Dantree," she said, as he passed by her side under the Norman arch.

He raised his hat.

"Thank you, Miss Dangerfield," he said gravely; and so, still by her side, walked up the drippling elm avenue and into the house.

His fatal beauty—fatal, though he was but seven-and-twenty, to many women—had done its work once more. Her own hand had brought him there, her own voice had spoken her sentence. Gaston Dantree stood under the roof of Scarswood Hall, and, until her dying hour, this day would stand out distinct from all other days in Katherine Dangerfield's life.

Sir John sat in his library alone, that letter from Paris still crushed in his hand as though it had been a serpent. It seemed a very harmless serpent at first sight; it only contained these lines, written in an elegant, flowing Italian chirography:

"PARIS, September 23.

"MY DEAR SIR JOHN DANGERFIELD: How delightedly my pen writes the title! A baronet! Who would have thought it? And Scarswood Park is yours, and your income is clear eight thousand a year. Who could have hoped it? And you're back in England, and *la petite*—the little Katherine. Darling little Katherine! So full of spirit and self-will, as she was when I saw her last, and that is fifteen years ago. Ah, mon dieu! fifteen weary, weary, weary years. My dear baronet, I am coming to see you; I *know* you will be enchanted. On the third of October you will send your carriage to Castleford Station to meet the 7.20 London express and me. And your servant will ask for Mrs. Vavasor. I adapt my names as I do my conversation, to my company; and, among the aristocratic county families of Sussex, let me be aristocratic, too. Adieu, my baronet, for the present; and allow me to subscribe myself by the old and, alas! plebeian cognomen of

HARRIET HARMAN.

"P. S.—Tell my pet, Katherine, I am coming. Kiss the darling child for me."

He had sat for hours as he sat now, that letter crushed in his hand, a grayish pallor on his face, his eyes looking blankly out at the drifting rain, at the tossing, wind-blown trees. The lightning leaped forth at intervals, the summer thunder broke over the roof, the summer rain beat on the glass. He neither saw nor heard; he sat like a man stunned by a great and sudden blow.

"And I thought her dead," he muttered once. "I *hoped* she was dead. I thought, after fifteen years' silence, I was safe; and now—oh, God! will the wicked wish never be granted?"

He sat there still as he had sat since he left the breakfast table, when the door was flung wide, and Katherine, dripping like a mermaid, stood before him.

"May I come in, papa, or have you fallen asleep? Do you know it is two o'clock, and past luncheon time, and that I have brought home a guest? It's Mr. Dantree, papa—you remember him, you know—and he wants to see the house, and *I* want *you* to be civil to him. He's in the blue drawing-room; and while I'm changing my habit I wish you would go up and entertain him. Papa!" She broke off suddenly, catching sight of his altered face. "What *is* the matter? You look like your own ghost!"

He rose up stiffly, as if his limbs were cramped, crushing the letter more tightly still in his hand. He turned away from the window, so that his face was hidden from her, as he answered:

"I am a little cold. Who did you say was waiting, Kather-

ine? Oh, yes; the singing man—Gaston Dantree. By the bye, Kathie, tell Harrison to prepare one of the front chambers for a—a lady—an old friend of mine—who is coming to visit us. She will be here on the evening of the third of October next, and her name is Mrs. Vavasor."

## CHAPTER II.

### MRS. VAVASOR.

THE London express, due at Castleford station at 7.20, rushed in with an unearthly shriek, like Sinbad's black monster, with the one red, fiery eye. There were five passengers for the town—four men and a woman. The train disgorged them and then fled away, shrieking once more, into the black October night.

A wet and gusty autumn evening, a black and starless sky frowning down upon a black and sodden earth. A bitter blast blew up from the sea, and whirled the dead leaves in drifts before it. The station, dreary and isolated, as it is in the nature of stations to be, looked drearier than ever to-night. Far off the lamps of the town glimmered athwart the rain and fog, specks of light in the eerie gloom.

The four male passengers who had quitted the train hurried with their portmanteaus, buttoned to the chin, and with hats slouched forward over their noses—honest shopkeepers of Castleford, but looking villanously brigandish in the light of the station lamps. Only the female passenger remained, and she came tripping up the platform with a little satchel in her hand, crisp and smiling, to the chief station official.

"I *beg* your pardon, sir; but can you tell me if the carriage from Scarswood Park is waiting for me?"

She was a beautiful little woman. Two great dark eyes of lustrous light beamed up in the official's face, and a smile that lit up the whole station with its radiance dazzled him. She had feathery black ringlets—she had a brilliant high color—well, a trifle *too* high, probably, for some fastidious tastes—she had teeth white and more glistening than anything the official had ever seen outside a dentist's show-case—she had the tiniest lit-

dle figure in the world, and she had—as far as the official could judge, for the glitter of her whole appearance—some three-and-thirty years. With the flash of her white teeth, the sparkle of the black eyes, the glow of the rose-red cheeks, she dazzled you like a sudden burst of sunlight, and you never stopped to think until afterward how sharp and rasping was the voice in which she addressed you.

The carriage from Scarswood? No, it had not—that is to say the official did not know whether it had or not.

Would the lady be pleased to sit down? there was a fire in here, and he would go and ascertain.

"I certainly expected to find it waiting," the little lady said, tripping lightly after him. "Sir John knows I am coming to-night. He is *such* an old friend of mine—Sir John. It's odd now the carriage isn't waiting—tell them when they do come, Mrs. Vavasor is here."

"The carriage has come," announced the official on the moment. "This way, madame, if you please."

The close carriage, its lamps glowing like two red eyes in the darkness, its horses pawing the ground, its coachman stiff and surly on the box, was drawn up at the station door. The official held the door open—she thanked him with a radiant smile, and then Sir John Dangerfield's carriage was flying through the darkness of the wet October night over the muddy high road to Scarswood Park. Little Mrs. Vavasor wiped the blurred glass, and strained her bright black eyes as the vehicle whirled up the avenue, to catch the first glimpse of the house. It loomed up at last, a big black shadow in the darkness. Lights gleamed all along its front windows, and the distant sound of music floated out into the night. Mrs. Vavasor's fascinating face was at its brightest—the sparkle in her eyes sparkled more than ever.

"A party—a ball perhaps. Let me see, the third of October—why *la petite's* birthday, of course. Miss Dangerfield, Heiress of Scarswood, is just seventeen to-night. How stupid of me to forget it." She laughed in the darkness and solitude, a little low laugh not pleasant to hear. "I wonder how poor dear Sir John will meet me, and what account he will give of me to his daughter? It couldn't have been pleasant for him to receive my note. I dare say by this time he thought me dead."

She stepped out a moment in the rain, then into the lighted vestibule, then into the spacious entrance hall, where Mrs. Har-

rison, in a gray silk gown and white lace cap, and all the dignity of house-keeper, met her courtesy.

"Mrs. Vavasor, I think, ma'am?"

Mrs. Vavasor's enchanting smile answered in the affirmative.

"Sir John's orders are every attention, ma'am, and he was to be told the minute you arrived. This way, if you please, and you're to wait here, ma'am, until he comes to you."

She led the way upstairs, and threw open the door of a half-lit, elegant apartment, all bright with upholstery, curtains, and carpet of blue and gold.

"How very nice," Mrs. Vavasor remarked, glancing pleasantly around; "and you are the housekeeper, I suppose, my good soul? And your young lady is having a party on her birth-night? How pleasant it must be to be only seventeen, and handsome, and rich, and a baronet's daughter."

Mrs. Vavasor laughed that sharp little laugh of hers that rather grated on sensitive ears.

"Miss Dangerfield is handsome, no doubt, Mrs.—— ah—"

"Harrison, ma'am," the housekeeper responded, rather stiffly. "And Miss Katherine is very 'andsome, indeed, in my eyes. I'll tell Sir John you're here, ma'am, at once, if you'll please sit down."

But it pleased Mrs. Vavasor to stand—she turned up the lamps until the room was flooded with light, then walked over to a full-length mirror and looked at herself steadily and long.

"Fading!" she said: "fading! Rouge, French coiffures, enamel, belladonna, and the rest of it are very well; but they can't make over a woman of thirty-seven into a girl of twenty. Still, considering the life I ve led"—she set her teeth like a little lion-dog. "Ah, what a bitter fight the battle of life has been for me! If I were wise I would pocket my wrongs, forego my vengeance, keep my secret, and live happy in Scarswood Hall forever after. I wonder if Sir John would marry me if I asked him?"

The door opened and Sir John came in. Little Mrs. Vavasor turned round from the glass, folded her small hands, and stood and looked at him with a smile on her face.

He was very pale, and grim as the grave. So for a moment they stood, like two duelists waiting for the word, in dead silence. Then the lady spoke:

"How do you do, Sir John? When we parted I remember you found me admiring myself in the glass; when we meet again, after fifteen years—*Dieu!* how old it makes one feel—

you find me before the glass again. Not admiring myself this time, you understand. I sadly fear I have grown old and ugly in all those hard-fought years. But you—you're not a day older, and just the same handsome, stalwart soldier I remember you. Won't you shake hands for the sake of old times, Sir John, and say 'you are welcome' to a poor little woman who has travelled all the way from Paris to see you?"

She held out her little gloved hand. He drew away with a gesture of repulsion, and crossing to the chimney-piece leaned upon it, his face hard and set, in the light of the lamps.

"Why have you come here?" he asked.

"Ah, *Ciel!* hear him!—such a cruel question. And after fifteen years I stand all alone in this big, pitiless world, a poor little friendless woman, and I come to the gallant gentleman who fifteen years ago stood my friend—such a friend—and he asks me in that cruel voice why I have come!"

"That will do, Mrs. Vavasor—this is not a theatre, nor am I an appreciative audience. Tell me the truth, if you can—let us have plain speaking. Why have you come here? What do you want?"

"That is plain language certainly. I have come here because you are in my power—absolutely and wholly in my power. And I want to stay here as an honored guest just as long as I please. Is that plain enough to satisfy you, or would you like me to put it still plainer?"

Her deriding black eyes mocked him, her incessant smile set his teeth on edge. Hatred—abhorrence—were in his eyes as he looked at her.

"You want money, I suppose? Well, you shall have it, though I paid you your price long ago, and you promised to trouble me no more. But you can't stay here; it is simply impossible."

"It is simply nothing of the kind. I have come to stay—my luggage is down yonder in the hall, and you will tell them presently to fetch it up and show me to my room. I do want money—yes, it is the universal want, and I mean to have it. Eight thousand a year and Scarswood Park, one of the finest seats in Sussex. And such an old family!—baronets created by James the First, and knights centuries and centuries before! How proud your daughter must feel of her ancient name and lineage!" And Mrs. Vavasor laughed aloud, her tinkling laugh that struck shrilly on hypersensitive ears.

"You will leave my daughter's name out of the question, if

you please," the baronet retorted haughtily; "such lips as yours sully her name. If you had one spark of womanly feeling, one grain of self-respect left from the life you have led, a woman's heart in your breast, you would never come near *her*. In Heaven's name go—I will give you anything, anything, only don't insist upon staying here."

For answer she walked back to the mirror, and deliberately began removing her bonnet, gloves, and mantle.

"As I intend going down and joining your party presently, and being introduced to the county families, I think I will go up to my room at once, if you please, Sir John. By the way, is Mr. Peter Dangerfield one of your guests on this happy occasion? It strikes me now I should like to know *him*. He is your only brother's only son and heir-in-law—after your daughter, of course. How awkward for that young gentleman you should have a daughter at all. And the estate is strictly entailed to the *nearest of kin*." There was a gleam of almost dangerous malice in her eyes as she turned from the mirror. "Yes, I am really anxious to make the acquaintance of Mr. Peter Dangerfield."

He turned almost livid—he made a step towards her.

"You would not dare," he said huskily; "you wretch! You would not dare—"

"I would dare anything except being late for Miss Dangerfield's birth-night party. Just seventeen! a charming age, and an heiress, and a beauty, no doubt? Ah! what a contrast to my waning youth. I grow melancholy when I think of it. *I* was seventeen once, too, Sir John, though to look at me now you mightn't believe it. Ring the bell, please, and let that nice old creature, your housekeeper, show me to my room. And when I'm ready—say—at ten o'clock—you will come for me here, and present me to your guests. No, really, baronet—not another word to-night on *that* subject. These serious matters are so exhausting; and remember I've been travelling all day. Ring the bell."

He hesitated a moment, then obeyed. The look of a hunted animal was in his eyes, and she stood there mocking him to his face. It seemed about as unequal a contest as a battle between a huge Newfoundland and a little King Charles, and the King Charles had the victory this time.

Mrs. Harrison answered the bell; in the brief interval no word had been spoken.

"You will show Mrs. Vavasor to her room," Sir John said shortly and sternly, turning to go.

"And I will be dressed by ten, and you will call for me here," responded Mrs. Vavasor gayly, over her shoulder. "How fortunate I have been in not missing the opportunity of offering my congratulations to Miss Dangerfield."

And then humming a gay French air, Mrs. Vavasor followed the housekeeper up another broad oaken stairway, along a carpeted corridor and into a velvet-hung chamber, bright with firelight and waxlight, luxurious with cushions, chairs, and lounges, fragrant with hot-house flowers, and rich with pictures.

"Your trunks are in the wardrobe adjoining, ma'am," Mrs. Harrison said: "and if there is anything I can do or if Miss Katherine's maid—"

"You good creature!" Mrs. Vavasor answered. "No, I am my own maid—I haven't eight thousand a year, you know, like your darling Miss Katherine, and can't afford luxuries. Thanks, very much, and—good-night;" and then the door closed gently in the housekeeper's face, the key was turned, and Sir John's guest was alone.

She stood and looked round the room with a smile, that incessant smile that grew just a trifle wearisome after the first half hour or so.

In the golden gleam of the light the tall mirrors flashed, the carpet looked like a green bank of June roses, the silken draperies shimmered, and the exotics in their tall glasses perfumed the warm air. Outside the rain beat, and the wind blew, and the "blackness of darkness" reigned. She listened to the wild beating of the storm in the park with a little delicious shiver.

"Is it like my life?" she said softly. "Have I come out of the rain, and the wind, and the night, to the roses, and waxlights, and music of existence? Or is the gypsy, vagabond instinct too strong in me, and will the roses fade, and their perfume sicken, and the lights grow dim, and I throw it all up some day, and go back to the old freedom and outlawry once more? The cedar palace and purple robes of the king look very inviting, but I think I would rather have the tents of Bohemia, with their freedom, and the stars shining through the canvas roof."

An hour later there descended to the long drawing-room a lady—a stranger to all there. She appeared in their midst as suddenly as though she had dropped from the rainy skies

a charming little vision, in amber silk and Chantilly flounces, and diamonds, and creamy roses in her floating feathery black hair. A little lady whose cheeks outshone all roses, and whose eyes outflashed her diamonds, and whom Sir John Dangerfield introduced to his guests as Mrs. Vavasor.

Who was Mrs. Vavasor?

Women looked at her askance—the stamp of adventuress was on her face and raiment.

The rouge was artistic, but it *was* rouge; the amber silk was shabby, the Chantilly, a very clever imitation, the diamonds Palais Royal beyond doubt. And then Sir John was so pale, so gloomy—the old soldier, not used to society masks, showed his trouble all too plainly in his perturbed face.

A woman not of their order—and the ladies' bows were frigid and chilling as the baronet presented her.

But the men—what did they know of shabby silks and brownish laces. They saw a brilliant little fairy of—well, five-and-twenty summers, perhaps—by lamplight—with the eyes and teeth of a goddess.

"But, Miss Dangerfield, Sir John—Miss Dangerfield! Miss Dangerfield!" Mrs. Vavasor cried, tapping him playfully with her fan; "those people are not the rose, though they have come to-night to do honor to that gorgeous flower. I am dying to behold Miss Dangerfield."

The stormy blue eyes of the Indian officer flashed; he gnawed his mustache, with an oath only heard by the lady on his arm. Her shrill laugh answered it.

"For shame, Sir John! So ill-bred, too! And that face! You look like the Death's-head the Egyptians used to have at their banquets. What *will* people say? There, I see her—I see her! that is Katherine."

She stopped short, still holding Sir John's arm, and a vivid light came into her black eyes. The baronet's daughter was advancing on the arm of Mr. Gaston Dantree.

"Katherine," her father said, bringing out every word with a husky effort, "this is Mrs. Vavasor, a very old fri—acquaintance." If his life had been at stake, he could not have said "friend." "You have heard me speak of her; she is our guest for the present."

He turned abruptly, and walked away.

Katherine Dangerfield held out her hand—for the first, the last time—to her father's acquaintance. Their eyes met, and on the only occasion, perhaps, in all her seven-and-thirty years

of life, those of the elder woman fell. The bright gray eyes of the girl looked straight through her, and distrusted and disliked her with that first glance.

"My father's friends are always welcome to Scarswood." She said it very briefly and coldly. "May I beg of you to excuse me now, I am engaged for this waltz to Mr. Dantree."

She was looking her best to-night and almost pretty; but then "almost" is a very wide word.

She wore pink tissue, that floated about her like a rosy mist, with here and there a touch of priceless old point, and a tiny cluster of fairy roses. She had pearls on her neck, and gleaming through her lovely auburn hair, a rich tea-rose nestling in its silken brown.

She looked graceful; she looked unspeakably patrician; she carried herself like a young princess. And the vivid light in Mrs. Vavasor's black eyes grew brighter as she watched her float away.

"She has her mother's face," she whispered to herself; "she has her mother's voice—and I hate her for her mother's sake! A home in Scarswood forever, the fleshpots of Egypt, the purple and fine linen of high life, would be very pleasant things, but revenge is pleasanter still."

One of the gentlemen to whom she had, at her own special request, been introduced, came up, as she stood, and solicited the pleasure of a waltz.

"I am sure you *can* waltz," he said: "I can always tell, by some sort of Terpsichorean instinct, I suppose, when a lady is, or is not, a waltzer."

Mr. Peter Dangerfield was right at least in this particular instance; Mrs. Vavasor waltzed like a fairy—like a French fairy, at that.

She and the baronet's daughter whirled past each other more than once—Katherine with her brown hair floating in a perfumed cloud, her lips breathless and apart, and her bright eyes laughing in her partner's face.

"Is she in love with that very handsome young man, I wonder?" Mrs. Vavasor thought; "and is he rich, and in love with *her?* If so, then my plan of vengeance may be frustrated yet."

"Mr. Dangerfield," to her partner, "please tell me the name of that gentleman with whom Miss Dangerfield is dancing? It strikes me I have somewhere seen his face before."

"Not unlikely, he's been everywhere. His name is Gaston

Dantree, and he is, I believe, a native of the State of Louisiana."

"An American! He is very rich, then—all those Americans are rich."

"Dantree is not. By his own showing, he is poor as a church-mouse; his only wealth is his Grecian profile and his tenor voice." There was just a tinge of bitterness in his tone as he looked after the handsome Southerner and his partner.

"'My face is my fortune, sir, she said,'"

hummed gayly Mrs. Vavasor. "How, then, comes monsieur to be here, and evidently first favorite in the regards of Si John's heiress?"

"His handsome face and musical tenor again. Miss Dangerfield met him at a concert, not three weeks ago, and behold the result! We, poor devils, minus classic noses, arched eyebrows, and the voices of archangels, stand out at the cold and gaze afar off at him in Paradise."

"Does Sir John like it?"

"Sir John will like whatever his daughter likes. Any human creature persistent enough can do what they please with Sir John. For his daughter he is her abject slave."

The bitterness was bitterer than ever in Mr. Peter Dangerfield's voice; evidently the heiress of Scarswood and her handsome Southerner were sore subjects.

He was a pale-faced, under-sized young man, with very light hair and eyes—so light that he was hopelessly near-sighted—and a weak, querulous voice. It *was* just a little hard to see Scarswood slipping out of the family before his very eyes through the headstrong whims of a novel-reading, beauty-loving, chit of a girl.

He, too, was poor—poor as Gaston Dantree himself—and at thirty, mammon was the god of his idolatry, and to reign one day at Scarswood, the perpetual longing of his life.

"And Miss Dangerfield is a young lady whose slaves must obey, I think; and Scarswood will go out of the family. Such a pity, Mr. Dangerfield! Now, I should think *you* might prevent that."

She made this audacious home-thrust looking full in his pale, thin face, with her black, resolute eyes.

The blood flushed redly to the roots of his dull yellow hair.

"I! My dear madame,"—with a hard laugh—"*I* stand no chance. I'm not a handsome man."

"Miss Dangerfield—I am a woman, and may say so—is not a handsome girl."

"All the greater reason why she should worship beauty in others. Gaston Dantree, without a sou in his pocket, a foreigner, an adventurer, for all we know to the contrary, will one day reign lord of Scarswood. See them now! Could anything be more lover-like than they are, Mrs. Vavasor?"

He spoke to her as though he had known her for years. Some *rapport* made those two friends at once.

She looked where he pointed, her smile and glance at their brightest.

The waltz had ended; leaning on her handsome partner's arm, the last flutter of Miss Dangerfield's pink dress vanished in the green distance of the conservatory.

"I see; and in spite of appearances, Mr. Dangerfield, I wouldn't mind betting—my diamonds, say, against that botanical specimen in your buttonhole—that Mr. Gaston Dantree, Grecian profile, tenor voice, and all, will NEVER reign lord of Scarswood; and for you—why you know the old rhyme:

> "'He either dreads his fate too much,
> Or his deserts are small,
> Who fears to put it to the touch,
> To win or lose it all.'"

She walked away, with her last words, her ever-mocking laugh coming back to him where he stood. What did the woman mean? How oddly she looked and spoke. How could *she* prevent Gaston Dantree marrying Katherine? But the last advice was good—why despair before speaking?

"To win or lose it all!" repeated Peter Dangerfield, stroking his feeble, colorless mustache. "By George! I *will* try. She can but say no."

There was a call for Mr. Dantree on the instant—Mr. Dantree was wanted to sing.

Mr. Dangerfield stood where he was, and saw the dark-eyed tenor emerge leisurely from the conservatory, and—alone. He sat down at the piano; his slender, shapely hands flew over the keys in a brilliant prelude. Everybody was listening—now was his time. Katherine was in the conservatory yet. He made his way slowly down the long vista of rooms to where, at the extreme end, the green brightness of tropic plants gleamed in the lamplight.

She still stood where her late companion had left her, in the recess of a window, her robe of pink tissue shining rosily, her

jewels glancing softly. Tall tropic plants spread their fan-like leaves about her; the air was rich and faint with exotic odors, and over all the soft, abundant light poured down.

Gaston Dantree's song floated in—an Irish song, half gay, half sad, wholly sweet—and a brooding tenderness lay on the girl's face—a great happiness, new and sweet—and made it almost beautiful. The rain lashed the windows, the wind of the October night blew in long, lamentable blasts through the rocking trees: but the storm and darkness without only made the contrast within the more brilliant.

"Katherine!"

She neither saw nor heard him until he was close at her side. She lifted up her dreamy eyes, her trance of bliss over.

"Oh, *you*, Peter! What an odious habit you have of stealing in upon one like a cat. I never heard you."

"You never heard me, Miss Dangerfield? You need hardly tell me that. You were listening far too intently to Mr. Gaston Dantree to hear anything else."

"Was I?" retorted Katherine. They rarely met, those two, except to quarrel. "Well, all I can say is that Mr. Gaston Dantree is very well worth listening to, which is more than I can say for you, cousin Peter."

"You mean I'm not a singing man, I suppose, Kathie? Well, I admit my brains do *not* lie in my throat and lungs."

"Nor anywhere else, Mr. Dangerfield."

"And when is it to be, Katie?" Mr. Dangerfield demanded, folding his arms; "when are we all to offer our congratulations? Such a flirtation as yours, my dear cousin, with this Apollo Belvidere from the Southern States, can have but one ending."

"And such a flirtation as yours with this pretty Mrs. Vavasor, from nobody knows where, can have but one ending, too, I suppose," responded Katherine, coming up to time bravely. "She is some five or six years your senior, I should think; but, where true love exists, what does a little disparity of years signify? A case of love at sight; was it not, cousin?"

"You might have spared me that taunt, Katherine; you know very well who it is *I* am so unfortunate as to love."

"Upon my word, I don't. My little cousin Peter, his loves and hates, are subjects that trouble me very slightly. There! Mr. Dantree's song is done, and they are playing the Lancers. Suppose we leave off quarreling and go and have a cousinly quadrille?"

"Not yet, Kathie. I can endure this suspense no longer. No, you shall not go; I *will* be heard! To watch you as I have watched you to-night with that man would simply drive me mad!"

"Would it? Then why on earth do you do it? I don't want to be watched, and I don't suppose Mr. Dantree does, either. You mean Mr. Dantree, don't you? And, Peter, don't put on that tragic face; it isn't your style, dear. You're too fair complexioned. And what business is it of yours, and why should it drive you mad?"

"Little need to ask, Katherine. You know only too well—because I love you. Kathie, don't look like that! I love you, and you know it well. I haven't had thoughts or eyes for any living creature but you since you first came here. Ah, Kathie! Listen to me. Don't laugh, as I see you are going to do. I love you with all my heart—better than ever that fellow can do—and I ask you to be my wife. Katherine, don't laugh at me, for Heaven's sake!"

But the warning came too late.

Katherine broke out into a ringing peal of laughter, that the music happily drowned.

Peter Dangerfield, looking desperately in earnest, very, very, yellow, and, with folded arms, stood glaring at her in an uncommonly savage way for so tender a declaration.

"I *beg* your pardon, Peter, but I can't help it. The idea of marrying you—only five feet five inches, and an attorney, and my first cousin! First cousins should never marry, you know. What would papa say, you silly little boy, if he could hear this?"

"My uncle knows," the young man answered, with sullen anger; "I spoke to him a month ago."

Miss Dangerfield opened her big, gray eyes.

"Oh, you did? That's what he meant, then, that morning after the concert. I remember; he tried to plead your cause. And you spoke to him first; and you're a lawyer, and knew no better than *that!* No, Peter; it is not possible. You're a nice little fellow, and I think a great deal of you; and I'd do almost anything you wanted me, except—marry you. That's a little too much, even for such good nature as mine."

"Then I'm to consider myself rejected?"

"Now, Peter, don't put on that ill-tempered face; it quite spoils your good looks, and you know you have none to spoil—spare, I mean. Well, yes, then; I am afraid you must con-

sider yourself rejected. I really should like to oblige you in this matter, but you perceive I can't. Come, let us make it up—I'm not angry—and take me back to the drawing-room for my dance. It is a sin to lose such music as that."

"In one moment, Katherine. Will you answer me this, please? Is it for Gaston Dantree I am refused?"

"Cousin Peter, I shall lose my temper if you keep on. If there were no Mr. Dantree in the case I should reject *you* all the same. You're very well as a first cousin; as a husband—excuse me! I wouldn't marry you if you were the only man left in the world, and the penalty of refusing you be to go to my grave an old maid. Is that answer decisive enough?"

"Very nearly! Thank you for your plain speaking, Kathie." He was white with suppressed anger. "But lest we should misunderstand each other in the least, won't you tell me whether or no Mr. Dantree is to be the future lord of Scarswood Park? Because in that case, for the honor of the family I should endeavor to discover the gentleman's antecedents. A classic profile and a fine voice for singing may be sufficient virtues in the eyes of a young lady of seventeen, but I'm afraid they will hardly satisfy the world or Sir John."

"For the world I don't care *that!* For Sir John, whatever makes me happy will satisfy him. I am trying to keep my temper, Peter, but don't provoke me too far—it isn't safe. Will you, or will you not, take me out for the dance? I am not accustomed to ask favors twice."

"How queenly she says it—the heiress of Scarswood!" His passion was not to be restrained now. "And it is for this Yankee singing man—this needy adventurer—this negro minstrel in his own land, that I am cast off?"

She whirled round upon him in a storm of sudden fury, and made a step toward him. But rage lent him courage; he stood his ground.

"You little wretch!' cried Miss Dangerfield, "how dare you stand there and say such things to me? How dare you call Gaston Dantree an adventurer? You, who would not presume to call your soul your own in his presence! Negro minstrel, indeed! You wretched little attorney! One should be a gentleman to judge gentlemen. That's why Mr. Dantree's beyond your judgment! Don't ever speak to me again. You're very offer is an insult. To think that I—*I* would ever marry you, a little rickety dwarf!"

And then dead silence fell.

I don't uphold this heroine of mine—her temper is abominable, I allow; but the moment the last words passed her lips her heart smote her. Peter Dangerfield stood before her white as death, and trembling so that he was forced to grasp a gilded flower stand for support.

"Oh, Peter! I am sorry!" she cried out, "I didn't mean that!—I didn't! I didn't!—forgive it—forget it—my temper is horrible—I'm a wretch, but you know," suffering a slight relapse, "it was all your own fault. Shake hands, cousin; and oh, do—do—*do* forget my wicked words!"

But he drew back from the outstretched hands, smiling a ghastly smile enough.

"Forget them? Certainly, Cousin Katherine! I'm not the sort of fellow to bear spite. You're very good and all that, but if it's the same to you, I'll not shake hands. And I won't keep you from dancing that quadrille any longer. I'll not be your partner—I don't dance as well as Mr. Dantree, and I see him coming this way now. Excuse me for having troubled you about this presumptuous love of mine; I won't do it again."

Then he turned away, and Gaston Dantree, looking like a picture in a frame, stood in the rose-wreathed entrance arch.

"I am sorry, and I have apologized," Katherine said coldly. "I can do no more."

"No more is needed. Pray don't keep Mr. Dantree waiting. And I would rather he did not come in here just now."

"Come, Kathie," Mr. Dantree called softly.

It had come to that then; it was "Kathie" and "Gaston." He saw him draw her hand under his arm as one having the right, whisper something in her ear that lit her face with sunshine, and lead her away.

Peter Dangerfield stood alone. He watched them quite out of sight—his teeth set, his face perfectly colorless, and a look in his small eyes bad to see.

"I have read of men who sold their souls to the devil for a price," he said, between his set teeth. "I suppose the days for such bargains are over, and souls are plentiful enough in the kingdom of his dark majesty, without paying a farthing. But if those days could come again, and Satan stood beside me, I would sell my soul now for revenge on *you!*"

"Are you sure you have one to sell?" a clear, sharp voice close behind him said. "I never thought lawyers were troubled with those inconvenient appendages—hearts and souls. Well, if you have, keep it; it's of no use to me. And I'm not

Satan, either, but yet I think for a fair price *I* can give you your revenge."

He whirled round with a stifled exclamation, and saw at his elbow—Mrs. Vavasor.

---

## CHAPTER III.

### AMONG THE ROSES.

SHE stood beside him, her ceaseless smile at its brightest on her small face, looking like some little female Mephistopheles come to tempt a modern Faust. He put up his eye-glass to look at her. What a gorgeous little creature she was! It was his first thought.

In the dim yellow light of the conservatory, the amber silk glittered with its pristine lustre, the yellow roses she wore made such an admirable foil to her dead black hair.

"What the deuce brings me here? Don't trouble yourself to ask the question, *mon ami*, your face asks it for you. I've been eavesdropping," in her airiest tone; "not intentionally, you understand," as the young man continued to stare speechlessly at her through his eye-glass. "Entering the conservatory by the merest chance, I overheard Miss Dangerfield's last words to you; 'a little more than kin, and less than kind,' were they not? Permit me to congratulate you, Mr. Dangerfield."

"Congratulate me!" Mr. Dangerfield repeated, dropping his double-barrelled eye-glass and glowering vengefully at the fair creature by his side. "In Heaven's name, on what?"

"On having escaped becoming the husband of a termagant. Believe me, not even Scarswood and eight thousand a year would counterbalance so atrocious a temper as that."

"Eight thousand a year would counterbalance with me even a worse temper than that, Mrs. Vavasor," the lawyer answered, grimly. "I am only sorry I am not to have the opportunity of trying. Once my wife, I think I could correct the acidity of even Katherine Dangerfield's temper and tongue."

"No you could not. Petruchio himself would fail to tame this shrew. You see, Mr. Dangerfield, I speak from past experience. I know what kind of blood flows in our spirited Katherine's veins."

"Very good blood, then, I am sure—very good tempered, too, in the main—at least on the father's side."

"Ah! On the father's side!" The sneer with which this was said is indescribable. "May I ask if you knew her mother, Mr. Dangerfield?"

"Certainly I did—a deucedly fine woman, too, and as amiable as she was handsome. Colonel Dangerfield—Sir John was colonel then—married a Miss Lascelles, and Katherine was born in this very house, while they were making their Christmas visit. You may have known her father and mother—you certainly seem to know Sir John suspiciously well—but don't tell me Katherine took her tantrums from either of them—I know better."

Mrs. Vavasor listened quietly, adjusting her bracelets, and burst out laughing when he ceased.

"I see you do—you know all about it. How old was Katherine when her father and mother left England for India?"

"Two or three years, or thereabouts. It seems to me—being so well acquainted, and all that, as you say—you ought to know yourself. Was it in England or India *you* came to know the Governor so well?"

"In neither, Mr. Dangerfield."

"Or does your acquaintance extend only to the baronet? Gad! he looked like an incarnate thunder-cloud when presenting you. His past remembrances of you must be uncommonly pleasant ones, I should say. Did you know the late Mrs. Colonel Dangerfield, Mrs. Vavasor?"

"I knew the late Mrs. Colonel Dangerfield, Mr. Dangerfield."

"And yet you say Katherine takes her temper from her mother. My late aunt-in-law must have greatly changed, then, from the time I saw her last."

"I repeat it," Mrs. Vavasor said, tapping her fan. "Katherine inherits her most abominable temper from her mother, the only inheritance her mother ever left her. And she looks like her—wonderfully like her—*so* like," Mrs. Vavasor repeated in a strange, suppressed voice, "that I could almost take her for a ghost in pink gauze."

"Like her mother!" cried Peter Dangerfield. "I beg your pardon, Mrs. Vavasor, but you must be dreaming. She is no more like her mother than I am. The late Mrs. Dangerfield was a handsome woman."

"Which our spirited heiress never will be. I agree with you,

Mr. Dangerfield; and yet you told me you were in love with her, and wanted to marry her."

"I meant what I said," the young man responded, sullenly "I do want to marry her."

"Or her fortune—which?"

"I don't see that that's any business of yours, Mrs. Vavasor, and I don't see what I am standing here abusing Katherine to you for. You don't like her, do you? Now what has she ever done to you?"

"Nothing whatever—*I* haven't seen Katherine until to-night for fifteen years. She was two years old then—a little demoiselle in pantalettes, and too young to have an enemy."

"Yet you *are* her enemy, Mrs. Vavasor, and you sit at her table and eat her bread and salt. And you speak of her mother as if you detested her. Is it for the mother's sake you hate the daughter?"

"For the mother's sake." She repeated the four short words with a concentrated bitterness that rather repelled her companion. "And you hate her for her own, Mr. Dangerfield." She laid her little hand suddenly and sharply on his arm, and sent the words in his ear in a sibillant whisper. "We both hate her; let us make common cause together, and have our revenge."

Peter Dangerfield threw off the gloved hand that felt unpleasantly like a steel manacle on his wrist.

"Don't be melodramatic, if you please, Mrs. Vavasor. Revenge, indeed. And I a lawyer. You would make an uncommonly good first actress, my dear madam, but in private life your histrionic talents are quite thrown away. Revenge! bah! Why the vendetta has gone out of fashion even in Corsica. We don't live in the days of the handsome Lucrezia, when a perfumed rose or a pair of Jouvin's best kids sent one's adversary to glory. There is no such word as revenge in these latter days, my dear madam. If one's wife runs away from one with some other fellow, we don't follow and wipe out our dishonor in his blood; we simply go to Sir Creswell and get a divorce. If we run away with some other fellow's wife, that other fellow sues us for damages, and makes a good thing of it. Believe me, Mrs. Vavasor, revenge is a word that will soon be obsolete, except on theatrical boards. But at the same time I should like to know what you mean?"

"What is that you sing me there?" Mrs. Vavasor cried, in the French idiom she used when excited. "While the world lasts, and men love, and hate, and use swords and pistols, re-

venge will *never* go out of fashion. And you hate your cousin —hate her so that if looks were lightning she would have fallen at your feet ten minutes ago. '*A little rickety dwarf.*'" She laughed her shrill, somewhat elfish laugh. "Not a pleasant name to be called, Mr. Dangerfield."

His face blackened at the remembrance, his small, pale eyes shot forth that steely fire light blue eyes only can flash.

"Why do you remind me of that?" he said hoarsely. "She did not mean it—she said so."

"She said so—she said so!" his companion cried, scornfully. "Peter Dangerfield, you're not the man I take you for if you endure quietly such an insult as that. And look at her now, with Gaston Dantree, that penniless tenor-singer, with the voice of an angel and the face of a god. Look how she smiles up at him. Did she ever give you such a glance as that? See how he bends over her and whispers in her ear. Did she ever listen to you with that happy face, those drooping, downcast eyes? Why she loves that man—that impoverished adventurer; and love and happiness make her almost beautiful. And she called you a rickety dwarf. Perhaps even now they are laughing over it rather as a good joke."

"Woman! Devil!" her victim burst out, goaded to frenzy. "You lie! Katherine Dangerfield would stoop to no such baseness as that!"

"Would she not? You have yet to learn to what depths of baseness women like her can stoop. She has bad, bitter bad blood in her veins, I tell you. She comes of a daring and unscrupulous race. Oh, don't look at me like that—I don't mean the Dangerfields. And you will bear her merciless taunt, and stand quietly by while she marries yonder handsome coxcomb, and go and be best man at the wedding, and take your hat off forever after when you meet Gaston Dantree, Lord of Scarswood Park. Bah! Peter Dangerfield, you must have milk and water in your veins instead of blood, and I am only wasting my time here talking to you. I'll detain you no longer. I wish you good-evening."

She had goaded him to the right point at last. As she turned to go he caught her arm fiercely and held her back.

"Stay!" he cried hoarsely; "you shall not go! You do well to say I hate her. And she shall never marry Gaston Dantree if I can prevent it. Only show me the way how! Only show me!" he exclaimed, breathless and hoarse, "and see whether I have blood in my veins instead of milk and water—

a man's passions in my heart—though it be the heart of a rickety dwarf!"

Ah! that blow struck home.

"Look at them once again, Mr. Dangerfield, lest your brave resolutions should cool—look at Katherine Dangerfield and her lover *now*."

The baronet's daughter was waltzing again—she had a passionate love of dancing, and floated with the native grace of a Bayadere.

She was waltzing with Dantree, her long rose-wreathed brown hair floating over his shoulder, her happy face uplifted as she whirled down the long vista in his arms to the intoxicating music of the "Guard's Waltz."

"You see!" Mrs. Vavasor said significantly; "he who runs may read, and he who stands still may understand. His melancholy tenor voice, his lover-like sighs, his dark, pathetic eyes have done their work—Katherine Dangerfield is in love with Gaston Dantree! It is a very old story: a lady of high degree has 'stooped to conquer.' Sir John won't take it, I dare say; but could Sir John refuse his idolized darling anything? If she cried for the moon she would have it. And she is so impetuous, dear child! She will be Mrs. Gaston Dantree in the time it would take another young lady to decide the color of the bridesmaid's dresses."

"She shall never be Mrs. Gaston Dantree if I can prevent it!" Peter Dangerfield cried, vehemently, his pale blue eyes filled with lurid rage.

"Yes, but unhappily there is the rub—if you can prevent it. You don't suppose now," Mrs. Vavasor said, thoughtfully, "this Mr. Dantree is in love with her?"

"I know nothing about it. He looks as though he were, at least—and be hanged to him?"

"That tells nothing. She is the heiress of Scarswood, and Mr. Dantree—like yourself, I haven't a doubt—is in love with that. I wonder if either of you would want to marry her if she hadn't a farthing—if her brown hair and her fine figure were her only fortune?"

"I can answer for myself—I would see her at the deuce first!"

"And unless I greatly mistake him, Mr. Dantree would also. How she looks up at him! how she smiles!—her infatuation is patent to the whole room. And after her, you are the heir-at-law, Mr. Dangerfield."

"I don't see what that's got to do with it," the young man retorted, sulkily. "I am likely to remain heir-at-law to the end of my days, for what I see. The governor will go off the hooks, and she will marry, and there will be a son—half-a-dozen of 'em, most likely—and my cake is dough. I wish you wouldn't talk about it at all; it's of no use, a man howling his life out for what he never can get."

"Certainly not—for what he can't get; but I don't perceive the 'can't get' in this case. Three people stood between Colonel Dangerfield and the title six months ago, and they—as you express it in the elegantly allegorical language of the day—'went off the hooks;' and lo! our Indian officer, all in a moment, steps into three pairs of dead men's shoes, a title, and a fortune. Scarswood may change hands unexpectedly before the year ends again."

"Mrs. Vavasor—if that be your name—*I* don't understand you. What's the use of badgering a man in this way? If you've got anything to say, say it. I never was any hand at guessing riddles. What the deuce do you mean?"

Mrs. Vavasor laughed gayly.

"Forcible, but not polite! Did you ever have your fortune told, Mr. Dangerfield? I have some gypsy blood in my veins. Give me your hand, and I'll tell it, without the proverbial piece of silver."

He held it out mechanically. Under all this riddle-like talk, he knew some strong meaning, very much to the point, lay. What could she mean? Who could she be? She took his thin, pale, cold hand, and peered into the palm, with the prettiest fortune-telling air imaginable.

"A strangely chequered palm, my gentleman; all its strange future to come. I see a past, quiet and uneventful. I see a character, thoroughly selfish, avaricious, and unprincipled. No, don't take your hand away; it will do you good to hear the truth once in a way, Mr. Dangerfield. You can hate with tigerish intensity; you would commit any crime under Heaven for money, so that you were never likely to be found out. You care for nobody but yourself, and you never will. A woman stands in your path to fortune—a woman you hate. That obstacle will be removed. I see here a ruined home; and over ruin and death you step into fortune. Don't ask me how. The lines don't tell that, just yet; they may very soon. You are to be a baronet, and the time is very near. How do you like your fortune, Sir Peter Dangerfield, that is to be?"

She dropped his hand and looked him full in the face, streaming fire in her black eyes.

"Hush-h-h! for Heaven's sake!" he whispered, in terror. "If you should be overheard!"

"But how do you like it?"

"There can be no question of that. Only I don't understand. You are mocking me. What you predict can never happen."

"Why not?"

"Why not! why not!" he exclaimed, impatiently. "You don't need to ask that question. Katherine Dangerfield stands between me; a life as good—better than my own."

The little temptress in amber silk laid her canary-colored glove on his wrist and drew him close to her.

"What I predict will happen, as surely as we stand here. Don't ask me how; I can't tell you to-night. There's a secret in Sir John Dangerfield's life—a secret I have been paid well to keep, which I have kept for fifteen years, which no money will make me keep much longer. I have a debt of long standing to pay off—a debt of vengeance, contracted before Katherine Dangerfield was born, which Katherine Dangerfield yet must pay. What will you give me if within the next three months I make you heir of Scarswood?"

"You?"

"I!"

"It is impossible!"

"It is not!" She stamped her foot. "Quick! Tell me! What will you give?"

"I don't understand you."

"I don't mean that you shall yet. Will you give me ten thousand pounds the day that makes you—through me, mind—lord of Scarswood? Quick! Here come our lovers. Yes or no?"

"*Yes.*"

"It is well. I shall have your bond instead of your promise soon. Not a whisper of this to a living mortal, or all is at an end. We are sworn allies, then, from this night forth. Shake hands upon it."

They clasped hands.

He shivered a little, unprincipled though he was, as he felt the cold, steely clasp of her gloved fingers. She glanced up, a flash of triumph lighting her eyes, to where Katherine Dangerfield, still leaning on her handsome lover's arm, approached

"Now, then, my baronet's daughter—my haughty little heiress—look to yourself! I am a woman who never yet spared friend or foe who stood in my path. *Væ victis!*"

She vanished as she spoke; and Peter Dangerfield, feeling like a man in a dream, his head in a whirl, glided after her, as his cousin and her cavalier stepped under the arch of rose and myrtle.

---

## CHAPTER IV.

### LOVE UNDER THE LAMPS.

"HOW charmingly cool it is here," Miss Dangerfield's fresh young voice was saying, as they came in; "how bewitching is this pale moonshiny sort of lamplight among the orange trees and myrtles; and oh! Mr. Dantree, how delicious that last waltz was. You have my step as nobody else has it, and you waltz so light—so light! It has been a heavenly evening altogether!"

She threw herself into a rustic chair as she spoke, where trailing vines and crimson bloom formed a brilliant arch over her head, and looked up at him with eyes that shone like stars.

"I wonder if it is only because balls and parties are such rare things to me that I have enjoyed this so greatly, or because I am just seventeen, and everything is delightful at seventeen; or because—because—Mr. Dantree, I wonder if *you* have enjoyed yourself?"

"I have been in paradise, Miss Dangerfield."

"And how gloomily he says it—and how pale and wretched he looks," laughed Katherine. "Your paradise can't be any great things, judging by your face at this moment!"

"Miss Dangerfield, it is because my paradise has been so perilously sweet that I look gloomy. The world outside, bleak and barren, must have looked trebly bleak to Eve when she left Eden."

"Eve shouldn't have left it then—she should have had sense and left the tempting apple alone."

"Ah, but it was so tempting, and it hung so deliciously within reach! And Eve forgot, as I have done, everything, the fatal penalty—all but the heavenly sweetness of the passing moment."

"Well," Miss Dangerfield said, fluttering her fan, and looking upward, "I may be stupid, Mr. Dantree, but I don't quite catch your metaphor. Eve ate that apple several thousand years ago, and was very properly punished, but what has that to do with *you?*"

"Because I, like Eve, have eaten my apple to-night, and to-morrow, the gates of my earthly paradise close upon me forever."

Divested of its adjuncts—there wasn't much, perhaps, in this speech; but given a young lady of seventeen, of a poetic and sentimental turn of mind—soft, sweet music swelling in the distance—a dim light—the fragrance of tropic flowers and warmth, *and* a remarkably good-looking young man—it implies a great deal. He certainly looked dangerously handsome at this moment, with his pale Byronic face, his fathomless dark eyes, his whole air of impassioned melancholy—a beauty as fatal as the serpent to Eve in his own allegory.

No doubt that serpent came to our frail first mother in very beautiful guise, else she had never listened to his seductive words.

The soft white lace, the cluster of blush-roses on Katherine's breast, rose and fell. She was only seventeen, and over head and ears in love, poor child.

She laughed at his romantic words, but there was a little tremor in her clear tones as she spoke:

"Such a sentimental speech, Mr. Dantree. Sussex is a very nice county, and Scarswood a very agreeable place, no doubt; but neither quite constitute my idea of paradise. And what do you mean by saying you leave to-morrow?"

"I mean I dare stay no longer. I should never have come here at all—I wish to Heaven I never had!"

It was drawing near! Her heart was throbbing with rapture; she loved him, and she knew what was coming, but still she parried her own delight.

"Please don't be profane, Mr. Dantree. You wish you had never come? Now I call that anything but complimentary to the neighborhood and to *me.* Be kind enough to explain yourself, sir. Why do you wish you had never come?"

"Because I have been mad—because I am mad. Oh, Katherine! can't you see? Why will you make me speak what I should die rather than utter? Why will you make me confess my madness—confess that I love *you?*"

He made an impassioned gesture, and turned away. Mac-

really could not have done it better. His voice, his glance, his passionate words, were the perfection of first-class drama. And then there was dead silence.

"You do not speak!" he cried. "I have shocked you; you hate, you despise me as I deserve!" He was really getting alarmed in spite of his conviction that she was hopelessly in love with him. "Well, I deserve it all! I stand before you penniless, with neither noble name nor fortune to offer you, and I dare to tell you of my hopeless passion. Katherine, forgive me!"

The rich green carpet was soft, there was no one to see, and he sank gracefully on one knee before her, and bowed his head over her hand.

"Forgive me if you can, and tell me to go!"

Then his soft tenor tones died away pianissimo in stifled emotion, and he lifted her hand to his mustached lips. It trembled—with an ecstacy too great for words. He loved her like this—her matchless darling—and he told her to bid him go! Her fingers closed over his, tighter and tighter—she bent down until he could almost hear the loud throbbing of her heart.

"Go!" she whispered, faintly. "Gaston, I should die if you left me!"

He clasped both her hands, with a wild, theatrical start, and gazed at her in incredulous amaze.

"KATHERINE! do you know what you say? Have I heard you aright? For pity's sake, do not mock me in my desperation—do not lift me for a moment to Heaven only to cast me out again! It cannot be—it is maddest presumption of me to hope that you love me!"

Her hands closed only the more closely over his; her head drooped, her soft, abundant brown hair hiding its tremor of bliss.

"I never hoped for this," he said; "I never thought of this! I knew it was my destiny—my madness—to ADORE you; but never—no, never in my wildest dream—did I dare hope *you* could stoop to me. My darling—say it just once, that I may know I am awake!" He was very wide-awake, indeed, at that moment. "Say just once, my own heart's darling, 'Gaston, I love you!'"

She said it, her face hidden in his superfine coat-facings, her voice trembling, every vein in her body thrilling with rapture.

And Mr. Gaston Dantree smiled—a half-amused, a half-exultant smile of triumph.

"I've played for high stakes before," he thought; "but never so high as this, or with half so easy a victory. And—oh, powers of vengeance!—if Marie should ever find this out! There's only one drawback now—the old man. The girl may be a fool, but he's not. There'll be no end of a row when this comes out."

She lifted her head from his shoulder and looked up at him, shy and sweet.

"And you really care for me like this, Gaston, and you really thought I would let you go—you really thought the difference in wealth and rank between us would be any difference to me? How little you know me!"

"I knew you for the best, the dearest, the loveliest of all women. But your father, Katherine—he will never consent to a poor artist like me coming and wooing his darling."

"You don't know him, Gaston; papa would do anything on earth to please me—anything. When he discovers how we love each other, he will never stand between us. He lives but to make me happy."

"You are sure of this, Katherine?"

"Certain, Gaston; your poverty will be no obstacle to him."

"Then he's a greater fool than I take him for," thought Mr. Dantree. "If I were in his place, I would kick Gaston Dantree out of the room. Good Heavens! if I should marry this girl and it should get to Marie's ears! If—I *shall* marry her—come what may. Eight thousand a year at stake, and Marie the only obstacle in the way, and hundreds of leagues of sea and land between me and that obstacle! There is no turning back now; come what may, I shall marry the heiress of Scarswood." He turned to her with almost real passion in his voice now.

"Katherine," he said, taking both her hands in his and looking in her eyes, "whatever betides, for good or for ill, you will not draw back—for good or for evil you are *mine?*"

She met his eyes full for the first time. She was pale, but there was no tremor in her voice as she slowly repeated his words. Clearly and firmly they came:

"Yours, Gaston—yours only. For good or for evil, to the end of my life—yours!"

For good or for evil!—ominous words.

For good or for evil the vow was plighted; and she stood under the lamps pledged to become Gaston Dantree's wife.

## CHAPTER V.

### BEFORE BREAKFAST.

IN the bleak, raw dawn of the wet October morning, Sir John Dangerfield's guests went home. While the lamps still gleamed among the flowers on the landing and stairways, Mrs. Vavasor, trailing the yellow glimmer of her silk robe behind her, went up to her own room—went up with the fag-end of a tune between her lips, a feverish lustre in her eyes, a feverish flush, not all rouge, on her cheeks, looking, as a hopeless adorer at the foot of the stairs quoted :

> "In her lovely silken murmur
> Like an angel clad with wings."

The adorer had taken a great deal of champagne at supper and hiccoughs interrupted the poetic flow of the quotation.

So also had Mrs. Vavasor herself. Perhaps a little of the brilliancy of eyes and color were due to the Cliquot, but then a good deal more was owing to triumph. Everything was going on so well. The little debt she had waited so long to pay off was in a fair way to receive a full receipt.

Peter Dangerfield was pliant as wax in her hands. Gaston Dantree was the man of all men whom she would have chosen for Katherine Dangerfield's affianced husband. And Sir John had passed the night in a sort of earthly purgatory.

"Poor old Sir John!" the little woman said, airily, to herself; "I'm really concerned for him. *He* never did me any harm—poor old soldier. How plainly he shows his abhorrence of me in his face; foolish, uncivilized old man. If his precious daughter were not so wrapped up in her curled darling she could not fail to see it. I suppose our handsome tenor proposed in the conservatory? What a capital joke it would be to let him marry her after all, and then speak out. I think I'll wait until the wedding day. Ah, my lady! my lady! You were a great peeress and a brilliant woman in your day, but you're dead now, and forgotten, and little Harriet, whom you circumvented so cleverly, lives still, and prospers, and hates you dead as she hated you alive."

The fire still burned on the marble hearth, the waxlights glimmered softly. She drew the window curtain and looked out at the rainy morning light struggling feebly in the stormy

gray sky. The elms and beeches rocked in the October gale, the swaying of the giant trees was like the dull roar of the sea. She dropped the silken curtain with a shiver and turned away.

"It gives me the horrors," she muttered; "it makes me think of old age, and death, and the grave. Will I live to become old, I wonder? and will I have money enough left to pay hirelings to smooth the last journey? This visit to Sussex will surely make my fortune, as well as give me my revenge. And when—*all is over*—I will go back to Paris—oh, my beautiful Paris! and live the rest of my life there. Whether that life be long or short I shall at least have enjoyed every hour of it. And, my lady, I'll be even with you to the last, and carry my secret to the grave."

She crossed over to the wardrobe where they had placed her trunks, opened one, and took out a book of cigarette paper and an embroidered tobacco-case.

"It's no use going to bed," she thought. "I never can sleep at these abnormal hours. A cigarette will sooth my nerves better than slumber."

She began, with quick, deft fingers, to roll half-a-dozen cigarettes, and then lying back in a luxurious arm-chair, with two slender arched feet upon the fender, to light and smoke. One after another she smoked them to the very last ash. The rainy daylight filled the room as she flung the end of the last inch in the fire.

She arose with a yawn, extinguished the lights, drew the curtains and let in the full light of the gray, wet morning. The great trees rocked wearily in the high gale, a low leaden sky lay over the flat, wet downs, and miles away the sea melted drearily into the horizon, In the pale bleak light brilliant little Mrs. Vavasor looked worn, and haggard, and ten years older than last night.

"Such a miserable morning! What a wretch I must look in this light. Captain Devere paid me compliments last night, fell in love with me, I believe, at least as much in love as a heavy dragoon ever can fall. If he saw me now! I believe I'll go to bed after all."

Mrs. Vavasor went to bed, and her eyes closed in graceful slumber before her head was fairly on the pillow. And as the loud-voiced clock over the stables chimed the quarter past ten she came floating down the stairs in a rose-cashmere *robe de matin*, and all her feathery black ringlets afloat.

"Am I first, I wonder?" she said, peeping in. "Ah, no;

dear Sir John, what an early riser you always were. You don't forget your military habits, though you *are* one of the wealthiest baronets in Sussex."

She held out one slender white hand all aglitter with rings. But as he had refused it last night so the baronet refused the proffered handclasp this morning. He stood tall and stern, and grim as Rhadamanthus himself, drawn up to his full height.

"We are quite alone, Mrs. —— Vavasor, since you choose to call yourself by that name, and we can afford to drop private theatricals. I fancied you would be down before Katherine, and I have been waiting for you here for the past hour. Harriet Harman, you must leave Scarswood, and at once."

Sir John's guest had taken a tea-rose from a glass of flowers on the breakfast table, and was elaborately fastening it amid the luxuriance of her black hair. She laughed as her host ceased speaking, and made the rose secure ere she turned from the mirror.

"That is an improvement, I think—yellow roses always look well in black hair. What did you say, Sir John? Excuse my inattention, but the toilette before everything with us Parisiennes. I must leave Scarswood at once? Now, really, my dear baronet, that is a phase of hospitality it strikes me not strictly Arabian. Why must I go, and why at once?"

"Why! *you* ask that question?"

"Certainly I ask it. Why am I not to remain at Scarswood as long as I please?"

"Because," the Indian officer said, frigidly. "You are not fit to dwell an hour, a minute, under the same roof with—with my daughter. If you had possessed a woman's heart, a shadow of heart, one spark of womanly feeling, you would never have crossed Katherine's path."

"Again I ask why?"

"I have given you your answer already. You are not fit—you are no associate for any young girl. I know the life you led at Homburg."

"You do? And what do you know of that life to my discredit?" Mrs. Vavasor demanded, in her sprightliest manner. "I sadly fear some malicious person has been poisoning your simple mind, my dear Sir John. I received a salary at Homburg, I admit; I lured a few weak-minded victims, with more money than brains, to the Kursaal; I gambled ever so little perhaps myself. But what would you have? Poor little women must live, penniless widows must earn their bread and

butter, and I labored according to my light. Who can blame me? A gambler's decoy is not a very reputable profession, but I did not select it because I liked it. As you say here in England, it was 'Hobson's choice.' To work I was not able, to beg I was ashamed. And I gave it up, when I heard of *your* good fortune, forever, I hope. I said to myself, 'Harriet, child, why lead this naughty life any longer?—why not give it up, pack your trunks, go back to England, and become virtuous and happy? Here is your old friend—well, acquaintance, then—Colonel Dangerfield, a baronet now, with a magnificent estate in Sussex, and eight thousand a year. You did him good service once—he is not the man to forget past favors; *he* will never see you hungry or cold any more. And *la petite* is there—the little Katherine, whom fifteen years ago you were so fond of—a young lady, and a great heiress now. To see her once more, grown from a lovely English Miss—what rapture!"

She clasped her little hands with a very foreign gesture, and lifted two great imploring eyes to his face. The baronet sighed heavily.

"Heaven help you, Harriet! You might have been a better woman if you had loved the child, or anything else. But you never loved any human creature in this world but yourself, and never will. I suppose it is not in your nature."

Have you ever seen the swift pallor of sudden strong emotion show under rouge and pearl powder? It is not a pleasant sight. After the baronet's last words there was a dead pause, and in the dull, chill light he saw that ghastly change come over her.

"Never loved any human creature in this world!" She repeated his words slowly after him, then broke suddenly into a shrill laugh. "Sir John Dangerfield, after half a century of this life's vicissitudes, the power to be astonished at anything earthly should have left all men and women, but you are sixty odd, are you not? and if I chose I could give you a glimpse of my past life that would rather take you by surprise. But I don't choose—at least not at present. Think me heartless, unprincipled, without conscience or womanly feeling—what you will—what does anything in this lower world signify except costly dresses, good wines, and comfortable incomes? And that brings me back to the point, and I tell you coolly and deliberately, and determinedly, that I won't stir one step from Scarswood Park until I see fit."

She folded her hands one over the other, and looked up in his set, stern face, with an aggravating smile on her own.

"It is of no use your blustering and threatening; if you should feel inclined that way, my dear baronet, it will do no good. I won't go. But you are too much a soldier and a gentleman to even try to bully a poor little woman like me. I have an object in view in coming to Scarswood; when that object is attained, I shall leave—not one instant before."

"And your object is—?"

"A secret at present, Sir John. As for your daughter,"—with sneering emphasis—"*I* should be the best judge, I think, as to whether or no I am a fit associate for her. Miss Dangerfield appears to be a young lady in every way qualified to take care of herself. And now, dear Sir John, as we thoroughly understand each other, suppose we take breakfast. It is past ten, and I am hungry."

"I never breakfast without Katherine," the baronet answered, coldly. "Mrs. Harman!"—abruptly—"they say every man has his price—will you name yours, and leave Scarswood forever?"

"Now what an indelicate way of putting it—my price!" She laughed. "Well, yes, Sir John, I don't mind owning as much. I have a price. Do you know what I said to myself last night when I first entered Scarswood? I said 'I wonder if Sir John would marry me if I asked him?' And Sir John, I wonder if you would?"

"Mrs. Harman," the Indian officer answered, with a look of disgust and contempt, "let us keep to the subject in hand, if you please. I am in no humor for witticisms this morning."

"Which, translated, means, I suppose, you would not marry me. It's not leap-year, I am aware, and my proposal may be a little out of place. But just think a moment, Sir John—what if the telling of your secret depended on it, and I should really like to be my lady?—what then?"

"Mrs. Harman, if you say another word of this kind I will turn you out of the house. Am I to understand, then, it is to tell you have come hither?"

His voice broke a little, the strong, sinewy hand that lay upon the broad window-sill, clenched. He bore himself bravely before her, but there was mortal fear and mortal anguish in the old soldier's blue eyes.

"For God's sake tell me the truth!" he said. "What have

you come to do? I saw you in the conservatory last night alone with my nephew—do you mean to tell *him?*"

There was an easy-chair close to the window; the widow sank down in its silken cushions—all this time they had been standing—and she flung back her little, dainty, ringleted head.

"As this conversation will be prolonged, no doubt, until Miss Dangerfield appears, we may as well take a seat. So you saw me in the conservatory last night with your nephew! I did not know you did me the honor to watch me, Sir John Well, yes, I *was* in the conservatory last night with Mr. Peter Dangerfield."

"And you told him all?"

"I told him—nothing! My dear old baronet, what an imbecile you must think me. Why should I tell him?—a poor little pettifogging attorney. I only drew him out there—read him, you know—and he is very large print, indeed. Woe to the man or woman that stands in his path to fortune!—better for them they had never been born. He never felt a touch of pity or mercy in his life for any living thing, and never will."

"I know it!" the baronet said with a groan. "I know it too well. My life has been a life of terror since this inheritance fell to me—fearing him, fearing *you.* If he had been any other kind of a man than the kind he is, I—think—I know I would have braved all consequences and told him the truth, and thrown myself upon his generosity. My life has been one prolonged misery since we came to Scarswood. I knew if you were alive, you would hunt me down as you have. It would be better for me I were a beggar on the streets."

Mrs. Vavasor listened to this passionate tirade with airiest indifference.

"Then go and be a beggar on the streets," she responded; "nothing is easier. Throw yourself upon your nephew's generosity—tell him that little episode in both our lives that happened in the Paris hospital fifteen years ago—tell him, and see how generous, how magnanimous he can be. You saw me talking to him, you say, in the conservatory last night. Would you like to know what we were talking about? Well—of Katherine!"

He stood and looked down at the small mocking face, and the derisive black eyes, gnawing the ends of his gray mustache.

"Of Katherine," Mrs. Vavasor said. "He told me he remembered her an infant here—in this very house, that she was two years old when she left England with papa and mamma

I asked him if he recalled her looks fifteen years ago, but naturally he did not."

Mrs. Vavasor laughed at some inward joke.

"Do you know, Sir John, he is in love with the heiress of Scarswood, and would marry her if she would let him? He proposed last night—"

"What!" the baronet cried eagerly; "he asked Katherine to marry him? And she—what did she say?"

"Called him a rickety dwarf—truthful, but unpleasant—and said *no* as your high-spirited daughter knows how to say it. He's not handsome, and Miss Dangerfield dearly loves beauty. She resembles her mother in many things—in that among the rest. She refused Mr. Dangerfield last night—still I think, my dear baronet, I shall have the pleasure of congratulating you upon the accession of a son-in-law."

"What do you mean?"

"Excuse me; our haughty little Katherine might not thank me for meddling with her *affaires du cœur*. And I wish so much to stand well with the dear child. So affectionate a daughter can have no secrets from you—she will tell you all about it herself, no doubt, before the day ends. And, Sir John, I can safely promise you this much—I shall leave Scarswood before your daughter's wedding day, to return no more."

He looked at her in painful, anxious silence. He felt that behind her words a covert threat lay.

"Before her wedding day. The child is but seventeen and not likely to marry for four or five years yet. I don't know what you mean, Harriet. For pity sake speak plainly—let us understand each other if we can. I don't want to be hard upon you, Heaven knows. I would pour out money like water to secure my darling's happiness—and you—oh surely! of all the creatures on earth, *you* should be the last to harm her. Don't betray me—don't betray her—don't ruin her life. I know I ought to tell; honor, truth, with all the instincts of my life, urge me to speak, but I know so well what the result would be, and I dare not!" A stifled sob shook the old soldier's voice. "I love her better than ever father loved a child before—better I think than ever, if that were possible, since this new danger threatened. If you keep silence there is nothing to fear. In Heaven's name, Harriet, mention any sum you like, however exorbitant, and leave this house at once and forever."

She sat and listened, without one touch of pity for the love she could not fathom; she sat and watched him without one

softening glance of the hard eyes. There was an unpleasant tightness about the thin lips, an almost diabolical malice in her furtive gaze.

"I will take ten thousand pounds, and I will leave Scarswood a week preceding Miss Dangerfield's wedding day. The sooner that day is named the better. That is my *ultimatum*."

"A week before her wedding day! Why do you harp on that? I tell you she has no idea of being married for years—a chi'd of seventeen!"

'And I tell you she has. Children of seventeen in this year of grace have very grown-up notions. Miss Dangerfield had two proposals of marriage last night; one she refused, one she accepted. If you have patience, your future son-in-law will be here for his answer before dinner. As Katherine will be on his side, your answer will be, 'Yes,' of course, though he were the veriest blackguard in England. If that tall slip of a girl told you to swear black was white, you would swear it, and half believe you were not perjuring yourself. You are too old to learn wisdom now, my poor Sir John; but if you were a younger man, I would try and convince you of the folly of loving, with such blind, dog-like devotion, any creature on this earth. No one alive is worthy of it—least of all a woman. *You* would die to make her happy; more, the soul of honor, by training and instinct, you are yet ready to commit *dis*honor for her sake. And she—if you stand between her and this good-looking adventurer, only seen for the first time a few weeks ago, she will set you down for a very tyrant and monster, and run away to Scotland with him the instant he asks her. Oh, yes she will! I'm a woman, and I know my sex. They're like cats—stroke them the right way and they'll purr forever; stroke them the wrong way, and their sharp claws are into your flesh, though yours the hand that has fed and caressed them all their life. Katherine is no worse than the rest, and when she leaves you and runs away with *him*, she is only true to her feline nature. I will take ten thousand pounds, cash down, one week before the day fixed for Kathie's wedding, and I'll leave Scarswood, and you, and her, forever—with the secret untold. The sooner that wedding day is fixed, the sooner you are rid of me. And I'll never come back—I'll never ask you for another stiver. Now we understand each other, and we'll get along comfortably, I hope. Don't let us talk any more on this subject, it isn't a pleasant one; and, Sir John, do, do try and look a little less like a martyr on the rack! Don't wear your heart on your

sleeve, for the daws of society to peck at. You know that tiresome story of the Spartan boy and the fox, or wolf—which was it? The animal gnawed at his vitals, but he kept his cloak well over it and bore the agony with a smiling face. I think the horrible little brute lays hold of all mankind, sooner or later; only some suffer and make no sign, and others go through the world howling aloud over the pain. *I* have hid *my* wolf for the last nineteen years—you would not think it, would you? Don't let everybody see you have a secret, in your face, or they may find it out for themselves, if you do. Here comes our little truant at last: and *Dieu merci*, for I am absolutely famished!"

Clearing the last three steps with a jump, according to custom, all fluttering in crisp white muslin, and lit up with bright ribbons, Katherine came into the room, her happy face sunshiny enough to illuminate all Sussex.

"Late again, papa," throwing her arms round him after her impetuous fashion and giving him a sounding kiss; "but last night was an exceptional occasion in one's life; one was privileged to oversleep one's self this morning. Oh, papa!" with a little fluttering sigh, "what a perfectly delicious party it was!"

"My dear," her father said, in a constrained sort of voice, 'don't you see Mrs. Vavasor?"

She had not until that moment. In her own happiness she had forgotten the very existence of her father's guest. Her face clouded ever so slightly now as she turned to meet the little woman's gushing greeting.

"Dearest Katherine—oh, I really must call you Katherine—how well, how bright you are looking this morning. Look at that radiant face, Sir John, and tell me would you think this child had danced twenty-four consecutive times last night? *I* counted, my pet," with her tinkling laugh—"danced until broad day this morning. Ah how delightful to be sweet seventeen and able to look like this after a long night's steady waltzing."

She would have kissed her, but Katherine's crystal clear eyes detected the rouge on her lips, and Katherine, who never resisted an impulse in her whole life, shrank back palpably.

"What!" Mrs. Vavasor exclaimed gayly; "you won't kiss me, you proud little English girl? Never mind, I foresee we shall be great friends—don't you think so, Sir John? if only for her mother's sake."

"My mother's sake!' Katherine repeated. "You knew my mother?"

"Very well, indeed, my dear—I was her most intimate friend. And you are like her—like her every way—in face, in manner, in voice. I should have been fond of you in any case, but since you resemble your mother so strongly, think how I must love you now!"

---

## CHAPTER VI.

### ASKING IN MARRIAGE.

MRS. VAVASOR might be never so vivacious, but it was a very silent, not to say gloomy, meal. Sir John sat moodily, eating little, and watching his daughter with strange new interest in his eyes. His perplexities seemed thickening around him. It was surely bad enough to have this obnoxious visitor on his hands, without an objectionable son-in-law flung in his face willy-nilly also. Who could the man be? He had not, if you will believe it, the remotest idea. He had been so completely absorbed by his espionage over the little widow all night that he had scarcely once remarked his daughter. Who can the man be? He thought over the list of his unmarried masculine guests and lit upon Captain De Vere, of the Plungers, as the man.

"And if it be he," the baronet thought with an inward groan, "there is nothing for it but to make a clean breast of it before the wedding. And how will it be then? He is a very heavy swell, De Vere, and will one day write his name high in the peerage. He may be in love with Katherine now—how will it be when he knows the truth? Heaven help me! was ever man so badgered as I am?"

Katherine was very silent, too; even her hearty girl's morning appetite seemed to have failed her. She trifled with what lay on her plate, a tender half-smile on her lips and in her eyes. Love had taken away appetite. How handsome he had looked! the mellow lamp-light of the conservatory streaming across his dark, southern beauty. How nobly he had spoken! And he had feared refusal—this darling of the gods! He had thought himself unworthy the heiress of Scarswood—he who was worthy the heiress of a throne!

"I am glad I am an heiress for his sake," she thought: "I only wish my thousands were millions! Oh, Gaston! to think that your poverty would be any obstacle to *me*. I am glad you are poor—yes, glad, that I may give you all; that I may be in every way the good angel of your life!"

Mrs. Vavasor, chattering cheerily on all imaginable subjects, asked her a question. It had to be repeated ere it reached her ear, dulled by her blissful trance. She lifted her dreamy eyes.

"What did you say, madame?"

Mrs. Vavasor's rather shrill laugh chimed forth.

"What did I say, madame! and I have asked her three times. No, my dear, I'll not repeat my question as to whether you'll drive me to Castleford if it clears up, as I see it is going to do, being quite certain you will have other and pleasanter company. Look at that abstracted face, Sir John, and tell me what you think."

The baronet's answer was a sort of growl, as he rose abruptly from the table.

"I am going to my study, Katherine, and I want to speak to you—will you come?"

"Speak to me, papa?" Katherine repeated, faintly, her color coming and going nervously for the first time in her life.

"Yes." He offered her his arm, looking grimmer than she had ever seen him in all her experience. "Mrs. Vavasor will find some other means of amusing herself besides that drive to Castleford. My carriage and coachman are at her service if she really desires it."

"Very well, papa," Miss Dangerfield responded, with a meekness very different from her usual manner of frank impertinence which sat so well upon her. "Could he know?" she was thinking in some trepidation. "Can he know so soon? Did he see us last night in the conservatory together? and, oh! what will he say?"

Mrs. Vavasor watched the stalwart, soldierly figure, and the slight girlish form on his arm from sight, with a hard, cold glitter in her black eyes.

"Your coachman is at my service, Sir John, but your daughter is not. And her Royal Highness, the Princess of Scarswood, would not let me kiss her this morning! Like her mother again, very much like her mother indeed. And I have a good memory for all slights, little and great."

Sir John's study was a cosey room, on the same floor with the breakfast parlor, and commanding a view of the entrance ave

nue with its arching elms. He placed a chair for his daughter, still in grim silence, and Katherine sank into it in a little flutter of apprehension. Fear was a weakness that perhaps had never troubled the girl in her life. Whatever the blood in her veins, it was at least thoroughly brave. And, womanlike, it was more for her lover than herself she trembled now.

"Papa won't like it," she thought. "Gaston's poverty will be a drawback to him. He will forget he was poor himself only half a year ago, and refuse his consent. No, he won't do that; he would consent to anything, I think, sooner than see me miserable."

"Katherine," her father began, abruptly, "Peter Dangerfield proposed last night."

Katherine looked up with a start. Nothing was further from her thoughts at that moment than her cousin Peter—she had entirely forgotten him and their quarrel of last night. "Peter? Oh, yes, papa, I forgot all about it."

"Humph! highly complimentary to Peter. I need hardly ask if you refused him, Miss Dangerfield?"

"Certainly I refused him!" Miss Dangerfield retorted, her spirits rising, now she had found her tongue, "and his declaration ended in no end of a row." The heiress of Scarswood was a trifle slangy at times. "I lost my temper—that's the truth—at one thing he said, and spoke to him as I had no business to. I'm sorry now, and I apologized, but I know he'll never forget or forgive the affront. He's one of your nice, quiet, inoffensive people who go to church three times every Sunday, and who never do forgive anything."

"What did you say?"

Papa's voice was terribly stern—for him. Miss Dangerfield hung her head in deserved contrition.

"Papa! you know what an abominable temper I've got, and still more abominable tongue—I called him a rickety dwarf."

"*Katherine!*"

"I'm sorry, papa," Katherine repeated a little sullenly, and not looking up. "I apologized; it is all I can do; it's said, and can't be recalled! Scolding will do no good now."

There was silence for a moment. A pallor that even her wicked words seemed too trifling to call there overspread his face.

"A bad business!" he muttered. "Peter Dangerfield will never forget or forgive your insult as long as he lives. Heaven help you now, child, if you are ever in his power."

"In his power! in Peter's!" Katherine said, lifting her head haughtily. "What nonsense, papa! of course I shall never be in his power. And he provoked me into saying it, if it comes to that! What business had he to speak as he did, to insult—" Miss Dangerfield pulled herself up with a jerk, and looked up.

"Insult whom, my daughter?"

"Never mind, papa—a friend of mine."

"And a rival of his. Was it Captain De Vere, Kathie?"

"Captain De Vere! Oh dear, no, papa! Captain De Vere can fight his own battles—he's big enough and old enough. He has nothing to do with me."

"Then somebody else has. You are keeping something from me, and that is not like you, Kathie. You had another proposal last night."

Katherine looked at her father in sheer amaze.

"Why, papa, you must be a wizard—how do you find these things out? Did—did you see me in the conservatory?"

"*I* did not—I did not deem it was necessary to place Katherine Dangerfield under surveillance at her first party."

"Papa!"

"Oh, child! You compel me to say cruel things. The world will watch you if I do not, and report all shortcomings."

"The world may," Katherine said, proudly. "I have done nothing wrong—I know who has told you—you would never play the spy; it was that odious woman in the breakfast room. Who is she, papa, and what does she do here, and how long is she going to stay? I don't know anything about her, but I hate her already. Who is she?"

"She is Mrs. Vavasor. Never mind her at present, my dear—you are the subject under discussion. We have not come to this other lover yet—let us come to him at once. Two lovers! and yesterday I thought you a child. Well, well! it is the way of the world—the female portion of it at least. Katherine, who is the man?"

She looked up—grew very pale—met her father's stern, sorrowful eyes, and looked down.

"It is—papa, papa! don't be angry. He can't help being poor—and I—I like him—so," with little gasps. "Oh, papa, please! You never were cruel to your little Kathie in all your life—please *don't* begin now!"

He stood very still, listening to this outburst with a face that grew every moment graver.

"And it needs such a preface as this! You have to plead for him before even you tell his name. Who is he, Kathie?"

She got up, flung her arms round him, and hid her face on his shoulder.

"It is—papa, p-p-please don't be angry. It is Gaston Dantree!"

The murder was out! Of all the men he had thought of, he had never once thought of him. Gaston Dantree! An utter stranger—a singer of songs—his voice giving him the *entrée* into houses where else he had never set his foot. A schemer probably—an adventurer certainly—a foreigner also—and Sir John Dangerfield had all your true-born Briton's hearty detestation of foreigners.

"Kathie," he could just exclaim; "that man!"

"I love him, papa!" she whispered, between an impulsive shower of coaxing kisses; "and oh, please don't call him THAT man! He may be poor; but he is so good, so noble—dearer, better every way than any man I ever knew. If you had only heard him talk last night, papa!"

"Talk! Yes, I dare say." The baronet laughed—a dreary-sounding laugh enough. "It is his stock in trade—that silvery tenor of his; and all adventurers possess the gift of gab. It is the rubbish that keeps them afloat."

"An adventurer, papa! You have no right to call him that. You don't know him—you should not judge him. He may be poor; but poverty is his only disgrace. He does not deserve that opprobrious name!"

"It would be difficult, indeed, to say what name Mr. Gaston Dantree does not deserve. A penniless stranger who could deliberately set himself to work to steal the affections of a child like you—for your fortune alone! That will do, Katherine: I know what I am talking about—I have met men like Mr. Gaston Dantree before. And I have no right to judge him—the thief who comes to steal away my treasure! Child—child! you have disappointed me—you have disappointed me more than I can say."

He sighed bitterly, and covered his eyes with his hand; Katherine's arm tightened imploringly round his neck.

"But not angered you, papa, not grieved you; don't say I have done that!" She cried faintly, hiding her face. "Dearest, best father that ever was in this world, don't say you are angry with Katherine—for the first, the only time!"

"Heaven knows, my dear, I could not be angry with you if

I tried. Lift up your head, Kathie, and give me a kiss. Don't cry for your new toy, my child; you shall have it, as you have had all the rest. Only whatever happens in the future, don't blame me. Remember that I have nothing but your happiness at heart."

Her impetuous kisses, her happy tears thanked him. Since her childhood he had not seen her weep before, and the sight moved him strangely.

"And when am I to see him, Katherine?" he asked; "when is this unknown hero, without money in his purse, coming to claim the heiress of Scarswood? It requires some courage, doubtless, to face the 'heavy father;' but I suppose he does intend to come. And I think your Mr. Dantree has courage —no, that's not the word—cheek enough for anything."

"He will be here to-day," she whispered, lifting her head; "and papa, for my sake don't be hard on him—don't hurt his feelings, don't insult him for his poverty!"

He put her from him, and walked away with a gesture almost of anger.

"His poverty! as if I cared for *that!* The baronets of Scarswood have been poor men, often enough; but they were always gentlemen. I don't think your handsome lover with the tenor voice can say as much. But, whatever he is—blackleg, adventurer, fortune-hunter—I am to take him, it seems, to give him my daughter, and heiress, as soon as it pleases his sultanship to claim her. If not, you'll become a heroine, won't you, Kathie, and run away to Gretna Green with him? Katherine, if by some freak of fortune Scarswood and its long rent-roll passed from you to-morrow, and you stood before him penniless as he is, how long do you think he would prove true to all the love vows of last night—in the conservatory, was it?"

"For all the years of his life, papa," the girl cried, her large eyes flashing. "You don't know him—you judge him cruelly and unkindly. He loves me for myself—as I do him. Papa, I never knew you to be so unkind before in all my life."

"That will do, Kathie—I have promised to accept him when he comes—let that suffice. I confess I should have liked a gentleman born and bred for a son-in-law, but that weakness will no doubt wear away with time. Ah, I see—'lo! the conquering hero comes!' Will you dare trust him to my tender mercies, my dear, or do you wish to remain and do battle for your knight?"

For Mr. Gaston Dantree was riding slowly up the avenue

The sun which all morning had been struggling with the clouds burst out at the moment, and Mr. Dantree approached through the sunburst as through a glory. The girl's eyes lit, her whole face kindled with the radiance of love at seventeen And this son of the gods was hers. She turned in her swift, impulsive fashion, and flung her arms round her father's neck once more.

"Don't be unkind, papa, for *my* sake. It would kill me if I lost him—just that."

"Kill you," he laughed, cynically. "Men have died, and worms have eaten them, but not for love. There, go—I may be an ogre, but I'll promise not to devour Mr. Dantree this morning, if I can help it."

He led her to the door, held it open for her to pass out. She gave him one last imploring glance.

"For my sake, papa," she repeated, and fled.

He closed the door and went back to his seat beside the window. The last trace of softness died out of his face, he sighed heavily, and in the garish sunshine his florid face looked haggard and worn.

"If I only had courage to face the worst," he thought—"if I only had courage to tell the truth. But I am a coward, and I cannot. The revelation would kill her—to lose lover, fortune, all at one blow. If it must fall, mine will never be the hand to strike, and yet it might be greatest mercy after all."

The door was flung wide.

"Mr. Dantree," announced the footman.

Sir John arose with a stern ceremoniousness that might have abashed most men. But it did not abash Katherine's lover. In the whole course of his checkered career no man had ever seen Mr. Dantree put out of countenance. He came forward, hat in hand, that handsome mask, his face, wearing a polite smile.

"Good-morning, Sir John—I hope I see you well after last night's late hours. It was a most delightful reunion. And Miss Katherine, I trust, is well also after the fatigue of so much dancing?"

"My daughter is well!"—very stiff and frigid, this response. "Will you take a seat, Mr. Dantree, and tell me to what I owe the honor of this visit?"

He paused. The tone, the look, were enough to chill the ardor of the warmest lover. Mr. Dantree took them, and the chair, as matters of course. He laid his hat on the floor,

drew off his gloves, ran his fingers through his glossy black curls, and met Sir John's irate gaze with unflinching good humor.

"I come to you, Sir John, on a matter of supreme importance. As you appear in haste, I will not detain you long —I will come to the point at once. Last night I had the honor of proposing for your daughter's hand, and the happiness of being accepted."

This was coming to the point at once with a vengeance. Sir John sat gazing at him blankly. The stupendous magnificence of his cheekiness completely took his breath away.

"It may be presumptuous on my part," Mr. Dantree coolly went on; "but our affections are not under our control. Love knows no distinction of rank. I love your daughter, Sir John, and have the great happiness of knowing my love is returned."

Sir John Dangerfield actually burst out laughing. Somewhere in the old mustache there lay a lurking vein of humor, and Mr. Dantree's perfect *sang-froid* and pat little speech tickled it; and the laugh took Mr. Dantree more aback than any words in the English language.

"Sir!" he began, reddening.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Dantree—I certainly had no intention of laughing, and I certainly suppose you don't see anything to laugh at. It was that pretty speech of yours—how glibly you say your lesson! Long practice, now, I suppose has made you perfect."

"Sir John Dangerfield—if you mean to insult me—"

"Keep quiet, Mr. Dantree—you're not in a passion, though you feign one very well. You may be an actor by profession, for what I know, but I'd rather we dropped melodrama and kept to humdrum common-sense. Reserve all you flowery periods about love overleaping the barriers of rank—Katherine is not listening. Am I to understand you are here to demand my daughter's hand in marriage?"

Mr. Dantree bowed.

"You are to understand that, Sir John. I possess Miss Dangerfield's heart. I have come here this morning, with her consent, to ask you for her hand."

"And my daughter has known you—three, or four weeks—which is it? And you are good enough to acknowledge it may be a little presumptuous! Mr. Dantree, what are you? Katherine is seventeen, and in love with you; I am sixty-five,

and *not* in love; you possess a handsome face and a very fine voice—may I ask what additional virtues and claims you can put forth for my favor? Dark eyes and melodious tenors are very good and pleasant things in their way, but I am an unromantic old soldier, and I should like you to show some more substantial reasons why I am to give you my daughter for life."

"If by substantial reasons you mean fame or fortune, Sir John, I possess neither. I own it—I am poor. I am a journalist. By my pen I earn my bread, and I have yet to learn there is any disgrace in honest poverty."

"There are many things you have yet to learn, I think, Mr. Dantree, but easy assurance and self-conceit are not among them. You are poor, no doubt—of the honesty of that poverty I have no means of judging. At present I have but your word for it. Would you like to know what I think of you, Mr. Dantree—in plain language?"

"If you please, Sir John, and it will be plain, I have no doubt."

"Then, sir, you are, I believe, simply and solely an adventurer—a fortune-hunter. Be good enough to hear me out. I am not likely to repeat this conversation for some time, and it is much better we should understand each other at once. There is but one thing I would rather not see my daughter than your wife, and that is—dead!"

"Thank you, Sir John—you are almost more complimentary than I had hoped. I am to understand, then," he said this with perfect coolness, "that you refuse your consent. In that case I have only to bid you good-day and go."

Sir John glanced at him in impotent rising wrath. What it cost him to preserve even a show of self-control the fiery old soldier alone knew.

"You do well," he cried, his blue eyes afire, "to taunt me with my impotence. If I were a wiser man and a less indulgent father, by heavens! you *should* go, and that quickly! But I have never refused Katherine anything yet, and I am not going to begin now. She has set her foolish, child's heart on you, sir, with your cursed womanish beauty and Italian song-singing, and she shall not be thwarted—by me. She shall marry you if she wishes it—she shall never say *I* came between her and the dearest desire of her heart. Take her, Gaston Dantree," he arose, "and may an old man's curse blight you if ever you make her repent it!"

Perhaps somewhere in his hard anatomy Gaston Dantree

had an organ that did duty as a heart, it smote him now. He held out his hand to the passionate old soldier.

"So help me Heaven! she never shall. As I deal by her may I be dealt with!"

He spoke the words that sealed his condemnation. In the troubled after-days, it was only the retribution he invoked then that fell.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE SECOND WARNING.

BEFORE the expiration of a week, it was known to all Castleford—to all the county families of the neigbor hood—that Miss Katherine Dangerfield, of Scarswood Park, was engaged to Mr. Gaston Dantree, of—nobody knew where.

Had any other baronet's daughter so far stooped to disgrace their code and their order, the county families would have stood paralyzed at the desecration. *Being* Miss Dangerfield, nobody even wondered. It was only of a piece with all the rest. What could you expect of a young person—the term of lady would have been a misnomer—of a young person with some of the best blood in Sussex in her veins, who persisted in scampering over the downs and the coast for miles without a groom!—who treated her venerable father as though he were a child of twelve, who wore her hair streaming down her back at the mature age of seventeen, who called every Goody and Gaffer in the parish by their christian name, who was quite capable of speaking to anybody without an introduction, who knew every game that could be played on the cards, and who talked slang? What could you expect of a demoralized young woman like this? The Dangerfield lineage was unexceptionable—there must be a cross somewhere, a bar sinister on the mother's side; it was a wild impossibility the old blood could degenerate in this way.

Who was Mr. Gaston Dantree? The county families asked this question with intense curiosity now, and found the answer all too meagre. Mr. Dantree himself responded to it with that

perfect, high-bred self-possession which characterized him; and everybody had to take his own account, or go look for proof.

"I am an American—a Southerner, as you know," Mr. Dantree had said; "my native State is Louisiana. I am that famous historical personage, 'the son of poor but honest parents,' now and for many years dead. By profession I am a journalist; I am connected with the *New Orleans P——*. An unexpected windfall, in the way of a small legacy, enabled me, six months ago, to realize a long-cherished dream of mine and visit England. My leave of absence expires in two months, when I must either return to New Orleans or—"

Here Mr. Dantree was wont to break off if Miss Dangerfield were present, with a profound sigh and a glance that spoke lexicons.

Squire Talbot, of Morecambe, with whom Mr. Dantree had come down to London, and with whom he was still staying, when brought upon the stand in turn and cross-examined, could throw very little more light on his guest's antecedents.

"Deuced sorry, now, Sir John, I ever *did* bring the fellow down," young Mr. Talbot said, the first time he met the baronet, pulling his tawny mustache with gloomy ferocity; "but how the deuce could I tell Miss Dangerfield would go and—no, I mean Dantree, be hanged to him!—would go and make love to Miss Dangerfield? I put it to yourself—now could I, Sir John? I'm deuced sorry, and all that, but I don't know a blessed thing about him except that 'he's a jolly good fellow,' as the song says, tells a capital story, sings like an American Sims Reeves, and can punish more champagne of a night and rise none the worse for it next day than any other fellow"—Squire Talbot pronounced it "feller"—"I ever knew. I met him first at a dinner at the Guards' Club, then at a Sunday breakfast at Lord Leaham's—invited to both these places, you understand, to sing. He knew lots of newspaper men—wrote flimsies himself for the sporting journals, and when I asked him—confound it!—to run down with me to my place in Sussex, he consented at once. And I am deuced sorry, Sir John," reiterated Squire Talbot, going over the same ground again; "and I hope, whatever happens, you know, you'll not blame me."

"I blame nobody," the old baronet answered, wearily; "these things are to be, I suppose. I shall write to New Orleans and make inquiries concerning the young man; I can do no more. Katherine is infatuated—pray Heaven her eyes may not be opened in my day!"

Mrs. Vavasor was perhaps the only one who heard with unalloyed satisfaction of Katherine's sudden engagement.

"What did I tell you, Sir John?" she said, triumphantly. "What do you think of my powers of divination now? It's rather a mesalliance, isn't it?—for her father's daughter, rather a mad affair altogether. But, dear child—she is *so* impulsive, and *so* self-reliant, and so hopelessly obsti—no, that's not a pleasant word—so resolute and firm, let us say, that remonstrance is quite thrown away upon her. Let us pity her, Sir John, rather than blame; she comes by all those admirable traits of character honestly enough—inherited from her mother. And when is the wedding to take place?"

She threw her head back against the purple-velvet cushions of her chair, and looked at the moody baronet with maliciously sparkling black eyes.

"I don't ask merely from idle curiosity," Mrs. Vavasor went on, as the badgered baronet's answer was a sort of groan; "I inquire because the knowledge influences my own movements. One week before the day fixed for the wedding, I receive from you, my kind benefactor, that check for ten thousand pounds—a very respectable haul, by the way—and I shake the dust of Scarswood off my feet forever. My reception by both host and hostess was, I must say, of the least cordial, and I am made to feel every hour that I am a most unwelcome interloper. Still, I bear no malice, and not having any of your *sang-azure* in my veins, my sensitive feelings are not wounded. Perhaps a dozen years spent at Baden and Homburg does blunt the finer edge of one's nerves. I trust the wedding day will not come round too speedily—I really like my quarters here. My room commands a sunny southern prospect, your wines are unexceptionable, and your cook for an English cook, a treasure. Don't fix the happy day too near, Sir John. Dearest Katherine is *so* impetuous that she would be married next week, I dare say, if she could."

"I wish to Heaven it were next week, so that I might be rid of you!" Sir John broke out. "You bring misfortune with you wherever you go! Mrs. Harman, you shall leave this house! You sit here with that mocking smile on your face, exulting in your power until it drives me half mad to look at you. Take the enormous bribe you demand—I have no right to give it you, I know—and go at once. What object can you gain by remaining here?"

"Now, that is an unkind question. What do I gain? The

pleasure of your society, and that of Miss Dangerfield, to be sure; the pleasure of being hand and glove with the gentry of this neighborhood, who, like yourself, rather give me the cold shoulder, by the way. I wonder how it is?—none of them ever saw me at Homburg that I know of. I suppose the brand of adventuress is stamped on my face. No, Sir John; not one hour, not one second sooner than I say, shall I quit Scarswood Park. If the wedding is fixed for next week, then I leave this; if for this day ten years, then I remain that long. I dare say I should find life slow, and the character of a respectable British matron of the upper classes a dismal life; but still, I would do it."

He stopped in his walk and looked at her. The bold eyes met his unflinchingly.

"Well, Sir John?"

"Harriet Harman, you have some sinister design in all this. What have you to do with Katherine's wedding day? What has the child done to you that you should hate her? What have I ever done that you should torment me thus? Is it that at the last hour you mean to break your promise and tell? Great Heaven! Harriet, is that what you mean?"

Her steady color faded for a moment; her own, with all her boldness, shifted away from the gaze of the old man's horror-struck eyes.

"What I mean is my own affair," she said, sullenly; "and I *do* hate Katherine for her mother's sake, and her own. You needn't ask me any questions about it. I mean to tell you all one day—but not this. I want money, Sir John, and that promised check, of course, my poor little purse replenished. See how empty it is!—and all my worldly wealth is here."

She laughed as she held it up, all her old audacious manner back. Two or three shillings jingled in the meshes as she held it out.

"I want to replenish my wardrobe; I want to pay some bills; I want—oh! millions of things! Fill me out a check like the princely old soldier you are, and I shall get through the day shopping in Castleford; I will amuse myself spending money, while Katherine amuses herself listening to Mr. Dantree's fluent love-making. He's rather a clever little fellow, that son-in-law-elect of yours, my dear baronet, and I don't think he has given us his whole autobiography quite as it is known in New Orleans. I don't say there was anything particularly clever in his wooing the heiress of Scarswood, because

any well-looking young man, with a ready tongue and an elegant address, could have done *that*, and my own impression is that Miss Dangerfield, like Desdemona, met him more than half way. I'm ready to wager the nuptials will be consummated within the next three months. Now, that check, dear Sir John—and do be liberal!"

She rose up, and Sir John, with the look of a hunted animal at bay, filled out a check for a hundred pounds and handed it to her.

"A sop to Cerberus," the widow said, gayly; "do you know Sir John, I haven't had so much money at once for the past five years! How fortunate for me that I met Colonel Dangerfield and lady that eventful day fifteen years ago in the hospital of St. Lazare! And what a comfortable thing to a poor little widow a great man's secret is! Thank you, Sir John; my toilettes will do Scarswood credit during the remainder of my stay."

And Mrs. Vavasor kept her word. The faded silks and shabby laces, the Palais-Royal diamonds and soiled gloves were consigned to the lowest depths of oblivion and the widow's trunks. And silks of rainbow hues, stiff enough in their rustling richness to stand alone; cobweb laces of marvellous price, with the glimmer of real jewels, made the little woman gorgeous. If she painted, she was past mistress of the art; and none but a very expert female eye could have detected the liquid rouge that made her bloom so brightly, or that the sparkling radiance of her bright black eyes was the ghastly brilliance of belladonna. Sir John's one hundred pounds went a very little way in his visitor's magnificent toilet, and that first "sop to Cerberus" had to be very speedily and very often renewed. In her own way, she spent her time very pleasantly—tossing over purchases in the Castleford shops, making agreeable flying trips to London and back, driving about in a little basket-carriage and biding her time.

"All things are possible to the man who knows how to wait, my dear Mr. Dangerfield," she said one day, to the baronet's moody nephew. "I suppose the same rule applies to women. Don't be impatient; your time and mine is very near now. I have waited for nearly eighteen years, and here you are grumbling, ingrate, at being obliged to stand in the background for that many weeks! How is it that we never see you at Scarswood now?"

She picked up the Castleford attorney on one of her drives

Since the night of the birthday party, Mr. Peter Dangerfield had not shown his sallow face, colorless eyes and mustache inside the great house.

"I don't think you need ask that question—*you*, of all people," the young man answered, sulkily. "What the deuce should I do at Scarswood, looking at those two billing and cooing? They say marriages are made in Heaven—I wonder if this union of a fool and a knave was ever made in the celestial regions? In the infernal, I should say myself."

"My dear Mr. Dangerfield, aren't you a little severe? A fool and a knave! Would Katherine have been a fool, I wonder, if she had accepted you the other night?

"'Oh, my cousin, shallow-hearted,
O, my Kathie, mine no more!'

Don't be unreasonable, Mr. Dangerfield. You are as poor as Mr. Dantree, and—if you will pardon my telling plain truth—not half a quarter so good-looking. And then, she is not married to him yet."

"No, but she soon will be. It is rumored in the town that the wedding is fixed for early January. It's of no use your talking and chaffing a fellow, Mrs. Vavasor; the wedding day will take place as sure as we sit here, and the next thing, there will be an heir to Scarswood. In the poetic language of the Orientals, your talk of the other night is all 'bosh.' It is utterly impossible that Scarswood should ever fall to me."

Mrs. Vavasor laughed in her agreeable way.

"Impossible is a very big word, friend Peter—too big for my vocabulary. See here! Will you give me your written promise that on the day Scarswood and its long rent-roll becomes yours you will pay me down ten thousand pounds? It's a tolerable price, but not too much, considering the service I will do you."

He looked at her darkly, and in doubt.

"Mrs. Vavasor," he said, slowly, "if that be your name—and I don't believe it *is*—I'm not going to commit myself to you, or anybody, in the dark. I am a lawyer, and won't break the law. You're a very clever little woman—so clever that for the rest of my life I mean to have nothing whatever to do with you. If you had a spite at anybody, I don't suppose you would stick at trifles to gratify it. But I'm not going to become accessory to you before the fact to any little plot of yours. If

Scarswood ever comes to me, and I repeat, it is impossible it ever should, it shall be by fair means, not—foul."

Mrs. Vavasor lay back among the cushions and laughed till the echoes rang. They were in the streets of Castleford, and passing pedestrians looked up and smiled from very sympathy with that merry peal.

"He thinks I am going to commit a murder! I really believe he does! No—no! Mr. Dangerfield, I'm not a lawyer, but I respect the majesty of the law quite as greatly as you do. I've done a great many queer things in my life, I don't mind owning, but I never committed a murder, and I never mean to, even to gratify spite. Come! you're a coward, *mon ami*, even though you are a Dangerfield; but if you promise to perpetrate no deed of darkness on the way, will you give me that ten thousand when you are lord of the manor. Yes or no? just as you please. Sir John will, if you won't."

"I wish I understood—"

"Wait! wait! wait! You *shall* understand! we are drawing near the Hall. Is it a promise?"

"It will be a fool's promise, given in the dark—but yes, if you will have it."

Mrs. Vavasor's eyes sparkled with a light this time not derived from belladonna.

"You will give me that promise in writing?"

"In anything; it is easy enough to give a promise we never expect to be called upon to fulfil. If through you Scarswood Park becomes mine, I will willingly pay you the sum you ask."

"Very well, then—it is a compact between us. You fetch the document in writing the next time you visit us, and let that visit be soon. You can surely bear the sight of our lovers' raptures with the secret knowledge that they will never end in wedlock."

"If I thought that," between his set teeth.

"You may think it. I know that of Katherine Dangerfield which will effectually prevent Gaston Dantree from marrying her. Ah! Speak of his Satanic Majesty and he appears. Behold Katherine Dangerfield and the handsome lover her money has bought!"

They came dashing out from under the arched entrance gates, both superbly mounted, for Mr. Dantree had the run of the Morecambe stables. Remarkably handsome at all times, Mr. Dantree invariably looked his best on horseback, and Miss Dangerfield, in her tight-fitting habit, her tall hat with its sweep-

ing purple plumes, and wearing, oh, such an infinitely happy face, was, if not handsome, at least dashing and bright enough for the goddess Diana herself.

"Look," Mrs. Vavasor said, maliciously; "and they say perfect bliss is not for this lower world. Let those who say so come and look at Katherine Dangerfield and that beautiful creature, Gaston Dantree—the very handsomest man I ever saw, I believe, and I *have* seen some handsome men in my lifetime. Real Oriental eyes, Mr. Dangerfield—long, black, lustrous. And he bows with the grace of a prince of the blood."

The equestrians swept by. Mr. Dantree doffed his hat, and bowed low to the smiling little lady in the basket carriage. Miss Dangerfield's salute was of the haughtiest. Some feminine instinct told her her father's guest was her enemy, despite her sugary speeches, her endearing epithets, her ceaseless smiles.

"I hate that woman, papa!" Katherine more than once burst out to her father. "I hate people who go through life continually smirking. If you told her black was white, she would say, 'So it is, my sweetest pet,' and look as if she believed it—little hypocrite! I detest her, and she detests me, and she makes you miserable—oh, I can see it! now what I want to know is, what's she doing here?"

And Katherine stood before her father, and looked for an answer, with her bright, clear eyes fixed full upon him. He had shifted under the gaze of those frank eyes, with a sort of suppressed groan.

"I wish you would try and treat her a little more civilly than you do, Kathie," he answered, avoiding his daughter's searching glance; "you were perfectly rude to her last night. It is not like you, Kathie, to be discourteous to the guest that eats of your bread and salt."

"And it is very like her to play eavesdropper. I caught her behind a tall orange tree listening to every word Gaston and I were saying. I merely told her I would repeat our conversation any night for her benefit if she was so determined to hear it as to play the spy. She is an odious little wretch, papa, if she is your friend, and I don't believe she is. She paints and she tells polite lies every hour of the day, and she hates me with the whole strength of her venomous little soul. And she looks at you and speaks to you in a way I don't understand—as though she had you in her power. Papa, I warn you! You'll come to grief if you keep any secrets from me."

"Katherine, for pity's sake, go and leave me alone! I in her power! What abominable nonsense you talk. Go! walk, drive, sing, amuse yourself with your new toy—the singing man—anything, only leave me to read my *Times* in peace. I begin to believe Victor Hugo's words, 'Men are women's playthings, and women are the dev—'"

"That will do, papa," interrupted Katherine, walking away in offended dignity. "You can say things quite bitter enough yourself, without quoting that cynical Frenchman. Mrs. Vavasor may be Satan's plaything, for what I know. Of that you are naturally the best judge. How long is she to force herself upon us in this house?"

"*I* don't know. She will leave before you are—married"—the word seemed to choke him—"and, Kathie, child, I *do* wish you would try and treat her with common civility—for my sake, if not for hers."

"And why for your sake, papa? I hate doing things in the dark. What claim has she upon you that I should become a hypocrite and treat her civilly?"

"The claim of—of acquaintance in the past, of being my guest in the present. And, without any other reason, you might do it because I desire it, Katherine."

"I would do a good deal to oblige you, papa; even to—well, even to being civil to that painted, little, soft-spoken, snake-eyed woman. She has eyes precisely like a snake, and is to be trusted just as far. Papa, what is it she knows about my mother?"

"Your mother! What do you mean?"

"Just this—that she has some secret in her possession which you are afraid she will tell, and the secret concerns my mother. She is trading on that secret in forcing herself into this house, for you dislike her as much as I do, Sir John Dangerfield, only you won't own it. I am to be kept in the dark, it seems. Very well! I don't want to pry into your mysteries, only you can't expect me to shut my eyes to what goes on before them. That woman has some secret which you are afraid she will tell, and you pay her large sums for keeping it, and that secret concerns my mother. Don't look so thunderstruck, papa! I won't turn amateur detective, and try to find it out, and I will be as civil as it is in human nature—such human nature as mine—to be, only don't try to pass off that creature as an old friend or anything of that sort. And get her out of this house as soon as you can, for all our sakes."

And, when Miss Dangerfield walked out of the room in offended majesty, Sir John was left to enjoy his *Times* as best he might after learning his sharp-sighted daughter's discovery.

Katherine turned in her saddle now and looked after the pony phaeton and its occupant.

"How I do dislike that woman, Gaston!" she exclaimed.

"And you're an uncommonly good hater, *ma belle*," Mr. Dantree answered, coolly. "You can love, but you can hate also. In the blissful days to come, when I am your lawful lord and master, it shall be my Christian endeavor to teach you better morality. I know several people whose enmity I should prefer to yours."

"I could never be an enemy of yours, Gaston—never! Do what they might, I never could hate those whom I once loved. My likes and dislikes come at first sight. I detested that woman from the moment I set eyes on her."

"Feminine instinct, I suppose. There is no love lost between you, darling. I've caught her looking at you at times when she thought no one was watching her, and—well, it wasn't a pleasant look, either, to give or receive. She smiles a great deal, but it isn't a very mirthful smile, and she's the sort of woman to present you a dose of strychnine and a kiss together. What does she do at Scarswood? An old friend of his, I think Sir John said. He didn't look at her in a very friendly manner, by the bye, as he said it. She is a most unwelcome intruder, it is easy to be seen, to Sir John as well as to you. Why, then, does he not give her her *congé?*"

"Ah, why, indeed," Katherine repeated, with a frown; "I wish some one would tell me why. There is some secret understanding between them that I can't fathom, I wonder if papa ever committed a murder, or a forgery, or some interesting crime of that sort, and that this little human cat has found it out, and holds the secret like the sword of Dam—what's-his-name—suspended over his head by a single hair. That would be like the plot of a modern novel."

"Like the plot of a modern novel, perhaps, but not in the least like Sir John Dangerfield. Still I think you're right, Kathie; there is a secret understanding, and if that understanding relates to a crime, I don't believe Sir John ever committed it. The dear old dad doesn't over and above like me, my darling: still he's a game old bird, and never did mortal man or woman wilful wrong in his life, I'm positive. Doesn't our florid little widow often allude in an odd sort of way to

your mother, Kathie? Now, it strikes me the secret—for there *is* one—involves her."

"I think it very likely, indeed," responded Katherine, "and I told papa so only yesterday."

"You did! And what did he say?"

"Nothing satisfactory—only lost his temper—a chronic loss with him since Mrs. Vavasor's advent. He used to be the dearest old love, but he's become completely demoralized since that woman's been in the house. She always talks as if she had been an intimate friend of my mother's, and papa fidgets, and winces, and turns red and pale by turns, and never says a word. Mysteries may be very interesting," said Miss Dangerfield with a frown, "but I'd rather have them neatly bound in cloth than live in the house with them. One comfort is, she is going to leave Scarswood before—"

Katherine blushed, and laughed, and broke off.

"Well, *ma belle*, before when?"

"Before—oh, well, before we are married! Now, Gaston—on the public road, sir, *don't!* It's all very well to know that the sins of the fathers shall be visited on the children, and all that, but it's nowhere in the catechism, that the inconvenient friendship of the mother shall, and I devoutly wish our visitor in Joppa! I never saw my mother that I can recollect. I never heard papa speak much about her, and everybody tells me I don't look the least in the world like her—I don't look like papa either—Colonel and the late Mrs. Dangerfield were both handsome. No, I don't want a compliment—not even your eyes, Gaston, can make me out other than sallow and plain. And," with a little droop of the head, a little falter of the young voice, "I never wished in all my life as I have wished to be beautiful since—I have known you."

"My dearest Kathie," Mr. Dantree said, politely, struggling with a yawn, "for a very sensible girl, as girls go, you *can* talk precious nonsense sometimes! Sallow and plain! I confess I should never have found it out if you had not told me. You don't want to be cast in the mould of the stereotype British young lady, I hope, with a face like a pink and white wax-doll, and a head more hollow. I can only say if you had you would never have bewitched me."

"Gaston,' Miss Dangerfield said, "do you know what they say in Castleford—what Mrs. Vavasor says about you?"

"Not at present" answered Mr. Dantree, with his custom

ary imperturbable *sang froid*, "nothing good though, I'm quite certain."

"They say—it is almost an insult to you to repeat it—that it is not Katherine Dangerfield you love, but the heiress of Scarswood."

She looked up to see some outburst of indignation—to hear an indignant denial. But Mr. Dantree only smiled benignly.

"You don't think that is news to me, do you, Kathie? Of course, they think—why shouldn't they—I would myself in their place. My dear child, you are seventeen and haven't seen much of life—I'm seven and twenty and have seen it in all its phases. And I tell you no poor man, such as I am, ever married a wealthy wife yet, that the same wasn't said. He may love her with the passion of a second Romeo—it will make no difference. She is rich, he is poor, and it naturally follows he must be a mere mercenary fortune-hunter. There were people in Lyons, perhaps, who said Claude Melnotte only wanted Pauline for her fortune, until he proved his disinterestedness. Of course they say I'm a fortune-hunter and adventurer—I would be very greatly surprised if they did not. Your father thinks so—Mrs. Vavasor, knowing how she would act in my place, thinks so—your cousin Peter, furious with his late rejection, thinks so. But you—Kathie—my darling—" he bent his pathetic liquid dark eyes upon her, "you surely do not; if you do—then here—this moment bid me go, and I will obey."

"Gaston—what nonsense! If I believed, would I be at your side now? I should die if I doubted you."

Mr. Dantree laughed a little cynically.

"No, you wouldn't die, Kathie. Broken hearts went out of fashion with Paul and Virginia and our great grandmothers. You'd not die, Kathie—you'd forget me in six months for—what you could easily find—a better man."

Mr. Dantree was right, it would have been *very* easy to find a better man, but Katherine Dangerfield was seventeen, and the glamour of a melodious voice, of Spanish eyes, and a face like some Rembrandt picture was upon her, and her whole heart was in the words.

"I would never forget. When I forget you—true or false—I shall have forgotten all things earthly."

Something in her tone, in her eyes, moved him. He lifted one of her hands and kissed it.

"I am not half worthy such love and trust as yours. I am a

villain, Kathie—not fit to kiss the hem of your garment. My life has been one long round of

> 'Reckless days and reckless nights—
> Unholy songs and tipsy fights.'

But I will try—I will—to make you happy when you are my wife. And the sooner that day comes now the better. Miss Dangerfield," resuming his customary careless tone, "are you aware it is beginning to rain?"

It had been a fitful October day—now sungleams, now gray gloom. Katherine looked up at the sky, and one great drop, then another fell upon her face. The whole sky was dark with drifting clouds, and growing each instant darker. The storm which had been brewing all day was close upon them.

"And we are five miles from Scarswood, and in five minutes the rain will descend in torrents. Gaston, what shall we do? I had rather not get drenched, papa will scold."

"And I had rather not get drenched even without a papa to scold. Drenching includes influenza, watery eyes, and a tendency to talk through one's nose, and is *not* an interesting complaint. Can't we run to cover somewhere? You know everybody in this neighborhood. There's Major Marchmont's yonder—aren't those the ivied turrets of Marchmont Place I behold through the trees?"

"Y-e-e-s."

"My dear, I understand your hesitation. The gallant major did his best to snub me the other day, but I'm of a forgiving turn and don't much mind. I think I could endure that old officer's grim looks more easily than the raging elements on the open downs. Shall we make for Marchmont?"

"No," said Katherine; "if you can endure Major Marchmont's insults, I can't. We can do better than that—we can go to Bracken Hollow."

"With all my heart. Where is Bracken Hollow?"

"Not a quarter of a mile off. This way, Gaston, or we shall get the drenching after all. The place belongs to my old nurse—she came with us from India, and papa gave her the place to end her days in, and to get rid of her; she and Ninon, my maid, led a perfect cat-and-dog life. Quick, Gaston! Good gracious, what a deluge!"

The rain was falling in torrents now. Ilderim fairly flew before it—and Mr. Dantree followed his leader. They were close

to the coast; far away the white foaming sea heaved its dull booming on the shore mingled with the rush of the rain.

"Here we are!" Katherine cried: "and we have got the drenching after all."

And then Gaston Dantree looked up and beheld Bracken Hollow.

A long, low, black-looking house, lying in a sheltered green hollow, close to the shore, the brake or bracken growing thick and high all around, and tall elms shutting it in. An eerie spot, with the eternal thunder of the sea close down below the cliffs; a lonely spot, with no other habitation near.

Gaston Dantree was in no way a superstitious or imaginative man, but now as he looked, that chill, creeping feeling stole over him—that impressible shudder which makes people say "some one is walking over my grave," thrilled through him.

"A ghastly place enough, Kathie," he said, leaping off his horse; "a murder might be committed here and no one be the wiser."

"A murder once was committed here," Katherine answered; "a terrible murder. A young girl, no older than I am, shot her false lover dead under those funeral elms. They took her, tried her, condemned her, and hung her, and they say those ghostly lovers keep tryst here still."

Gaston Dantree still stood by his horse, looking with extreme disfavor at the black cottage, at the blacker trees.

"A horrible story, and a horrible place. I don't know why, but if you'll believe me, Kathie, I feel *afraid* to enter that house. I'm not a coward in a general way, and once, out West, slept a whole night in a room with a dead man, a fellow who had cut his own throat, without feeling any particular qualms about it; but I'll be hanged if I want to enter here. If I believed in presentiments now, or if there were such things, I should say some awful fate was going to befall me at Bracken Hollow!"

"Gaston, don't be a goose, and don't be German and metaphysical. Some awful fate will overtake you at Bracken Hollow, and that speedily if you don't come in out of the rain—an attack of inflammatory rheumatism."

She skurried with uplifted skirts into the low porch, and her lover slowly followed.

Katherine knocked loudly and imperatively at the door.

"She's deaf, poor soul," she said. "It's the only one of her

faculties, except her teeth, that she has lost. Are one's teeth one's faculties, Gaston?"

"Yes, my dear, and extremely important about dinner-time I can't say I envy your ex-nurse the cheerful spot in which she is spending the lively remainder of her days. Ah, the door opens. Now for the presiding witch of Bracken Hollow. Bracken Hollow—there's something ghostly and gloomy in the very name."

A tall old woman, pale and erect, with iron-gray hair and preternaturally bright eyes, held open the door and looked stolidly at her two visitors.

"How do, Hannah? Get out of the way, you hospitable old soul and let us in. You needn't mind if you're not dressed for company—considering the weather we won't be fastidious. Any port in a storm, you know. This is Mr. Gaston Dantree, Hannah. You've heard of him, I dare say."

Old Hannah reared herself a little more upright and transfixed the Louisianian with her brilliant little eyes.

"I've heard of Mr. Gaston Dantree—yes, Miss Katherine, and I'm glad you've brought him to see me."

"You don't seem to be very cordial about it then; you don't say you're glad to see him."

"I'm not a fine lady, Miss Katherine—I don't tell polite lies. I'm not glad. You're going to marry him, they say—is it true?"

"Well, yes," Katherine laughed, good-naturedly, "I'm afraid it is. You pity him, nursey, don't you? You took care of me a decade of years or so, and you know what he has to expect."

"I pity you!" old Hannah answered, with a second solemn, prolonged stare at her nurseling's lover; "I pity you! Only seventeen, and trouble, trouble, trouble before you."

It was not an easy matter to stare Mr. Gaston Dantree out of countenance as a general thing, but his eyes fell now before old Hannah's basilisk gaze.

"Confound the hag!" he muttered, turning to the window; "what does she mean?"

Katherine was fond of her old nurse—too fond to be irritated now by her croaking.

"Don't be disagreeable, Hannah," she said; "and don't stare in that Gorgon-like way. It's rude, and Mr. Dantree is modest to a fault. See how you put him out of countenance. Sit down here, like a dear old thing, and tell me all about the rheu

matism, and what you want me to get you for the winter; you'll have lots of time before the rain holds up."

"The rain is holding up now, Kathie," her lover said. "I knew it was too violent to last. In ten minutes it will have ceased. Come, we can go."

He could not account to himself for his feverish haste to leave this place—for the sudden and intense dislike he had taken to this grim old woman.

"I'll go and see to the horses," he said, and smoke a cigar in the porch, while you talk to your nurse."

He quitted the room. Katherine looked after the graceful figure and negligent walk with eyes full of girlish admiration; then she turned to Hannah.

Isn't he handsome, nursey? Now confess; you're sixty or more, but you like handsome people still, don't you? Isn't he just the very handsomest man you ever saw in all your life?"

"He's rare and handsome, Miss Kathie," the old woman said, slowly; "rare and handsome surely. But, my little one, don't you marry him. It's not the face to trust—it's as false as it's fair."

"Now Hannah, I can't listen to this—I really can't. I thought you would have wished me joy, if nobody else. Everybody says horrid things—nothing is too bad to be said of Mr. Dantree—and all because he is poor and I am rich—fortune-hunter, adventurer, false. It's a shame."

"It's the truth, my bairnie. Be warned, and draw back while there is yet time."

Miss Dangerfield arose with calm dignity. It wasn't worth while losing one's temper with old Hannah.

"Good-by, nursey—I'm going. You are disagreeable to-day, and I always go away immediately from disagreeable people. I shall send you those flannels, though, all the same. Good-by."

She was gone as she spoke. The rain had nearly ceased, and Mr. Dantree was waiting for her impatiently. His dusk, Southron face looked strangely pallid in the gray twilight of the wet October evening.

"Come, Kathie; it will rain again presently, and night will fall in half an hour. The sooner we see the last of Bracken Hollow the better."

"How frightened he is of Bracken Hollow!" Katherine said, laughing: "like a child of a bogie. Why, I wonder?"

"Why, indeed? Why do you hate Mrs. Vavasor, Katherine? She hasn't given you any cause—yet.

"'I do not like you, Dr. Fell,
The reason why, I cannot tell.'

I can't tell you why, but I never want to see Bracken Hollow again."

She looked up into his face. What a darkly moody expression it wore! It half-spoiled his beauty. And all the way home, through the chill, rainy gloaming, old Hannah's words rang like a warning in her ears: "False as fair—false as fair!"

---

## CHAPTER VIII.

### A LETTER FROM NEW ORLEANS.

MR. DANTREE dined at Scarswood, and rode homeward through the wet darkness somewhere before midnight.

It had been a very pleasant evening, and the Louisianian was in the best possible spirits as he rode back to Morecambe. The day was drawing near when a more splendid abode than Morecambe would be his—when he would reign supreme at Scarswood Park.

"The governor can't hold out very long now," Mr. Dantree mused. "After thirteen years of hill-life in India, his liver can't be the size of a walnut—and then, he's apoplectic. Your short-necked, florid-faced, healthy-looking old buffers are always fragile blossoms; it's touch-and-go with them at any moment. And he's taking his daughter's engagement to my noble self desperately to heart—he's been breaking every day since. I wonder what's up between him and the little widow? It wouldn't be pleasant if she should turn out to be a first wife, or something of that sort, and at his death produce an interesting heir or heiress and oust Mrs. Dantree. It looks suspiciously like it; she's got a strong claim of some kind upon him, and he's more afraid of her than he ever was of the savagest Sepoy out yonder. I wish I could get at the bottom of the matter, before I commit myself further and slip the ring over Miss Dangerfield's finger. Not that it matters very greatly—neither

matrimonial nor any other fetters ever could bind me. It *may* all turn out right, however, and I may reign grand seigneur of Scarswood. Rather a change in a few months, for a penniless penny-a-liner. Marie's the only drawback. If ever she finds this out, there'll be the devil to pay in New Orleans."

Miss Dangerfield had been rather surprised when on entering the drawing-room that evening, after her wet ride from Bracken Hollow, she found her cousin Peter playing chess with Mrs. Vavasor. It was the first time since their quarrel that he had entered the house. She went over to him with the frank, girlish grace that always characterized her, and gave him her hand.

"Welcome back to Scarswood, cousin," she said; "I began to think you had quite deserted us. Is it to the claims of kinship or to the fascinations of Mrs. Vavasor we owe the present visit, I wonder?"

"A little of both, Kathie, and a cousinly desire to offer my congratulations to the future Mrs. Dantree. I wish you both every happiness."

He did not look at her as he said it, and something in his voice struck unpleasantly on Katherine's ear.

"You are very good," she said, a little coldly. "May I overlook your game? Who is going to win?"

"I am of course. *We* come of a race, Kathie, that always win."

But Mr. Dangerfield was mistaken.

"Check!" Mrs. Vavasor cried, sharply and triumphantly, a few minutes after. "Your race may always win except—when they have a Vavasor for an enemy."

Katherine's eyes sparkled.

"Try again, Peter," she said; "a Dangerfield never yields!"

"I fear I must; I am no match for Mrs. Vavasor. Ah! here is Dantree—lucky dog! I must go over and congratulate him. It's not every day a poor devil drops into eight thousand a year and the finest place in the county."

"Katherine dear, suppose you try," Mrs. Vavasor gayly exclaimed, "and vindicate the honor of the Dangerfields. I play chess pretty well, but who knows—you may become more than a match for me."

"Well," Katherine said coolly, "I think in the long run I would. I have a great deal of determination—obstinacy perhaps you might call it—and when I make up my mind to do anything, I generally *do* do it."

"Such as marrying a handsome tenor singer. Don't be angry, Katherine. Mr. Dantree is worthy of you, I am sure. Now, then, for a pitched battle between you and me, and woe to the conquered!"

There was a sneering defiance underlying her words—a sardonic gleam in her black eyes that Katherine understood. There was more at stake than a simple game of chess; they looked at one another steadily for an instant, then began the game.

The two gentlemen approached. Peter Dangerfield took his place behind the chair of the widow; Mr. Dantree leaned lightly over that of Kathie. They stood like two seconds watching a duel, and neither spoke. A profound stillness filled the long, velvet-hung, lamplit drawing-room, in which you could hear the light falling on the cinders in the grate, the ceaseless beating of the rain on the glass. Which would win?

The widow, it seemed. In the gleam of the lamp-light there was a flush on her cheek that was not all rouge, a sparkle in her black eyes, not belladonna. She wore a wine-colored silk, *décolleté*, and her plump, white shoulders and arms shone like marble; the rich, ruby-red jewels flashed on her fingers, on her neck; a bracelet of fine gold and rubies encircled her wrist, and a crimson rose nestled in the shining, luxurious blackness of hair. All crimson and black—with a fiery intensity of purpose flushing her face—and that peculiar glittering smile of hers on her thin lips. Gaston Dantree thought of some beautiful Circe—some fatal siren come on earth to work ruin and darkness.

"And yet, after all," he thought, "I believe in my soul Katherine is more than a match for her. How coolly—how thoroughly calm and self-possessed she sits, not one pulse beating the quicker—while the eyes of her enemy are on fire with her devilish determination to win. In a long-drawn battle of any kind between these two, I'd back the heiress of Scarswood."

Then more and more absorbed in the game he forgot even to think. He bent over until his crisp black curls touched Katherine's cheek. She glanced up at him for a second—her still face brightening—a faint color coming in her cheeks.

"A drawn battle is it not, Gaston?" she said, "and a true Dangerfield prefers death to defeat."

Mrs. Vavasor saw both look and smile, and a savage resolution to win at all hazards possessed her. She knit her straight black brows, and bent to the game, her lips compressed in one

straight red line. She hated Katherine at that moment with an intensity she had never felt before. How coolly she sat there making her moves, with a face of marble, while *she* was thrilling in every vein with a fever of excitement. And how she loved that man behind her, and how happy she was in that love.

"And to *her* mother I owe all I have ever suffered—the sin, the sorrow, the shame! Pray Heaven they may fix the wedding-day speedily, or I shall never be able to wait! I wonder how I have waited all these years and years. Ah! a false move, my lady, a false move. The victory is mine!"

But the exultant thought came too soon. Katherine's move, made after long deliberation, certainly looked like a false one—the widow answered in a glow of triumph. A second later and she saw her mistake—Katherine's false-seeming move had been made with deliberate intention. Her eyes flashed for the first time—she made a last rapid pass and rose conqueror.

"Checkmated!" she cried, with a slight laugh of triumph. "I knew I should vanquish you in the end, Mrs. Vavasor!"

"Dinner!" announced the butler, flinging wide the door, and Miss Dangerfield took the arm of Mr. Dantree and swept with him into the dining-room.

"You did that splendidly, Kathie," he said; "you have no idea how proud I am of your conquest; and she was so sure of winning. She hates you as those little venomous women only can hate—do you know it?"

"Certainly I know it," Katherine responded with supreme carelessness. "I have known it ever since I saw her first. She hates me and could strychnine me this moment with all the pleasure in life."

"But why, I wonder?" said Mr. Dantree, "you never knew her before she came here—you never did anything to harm her?"

"My dearest Gaston, it is not always the people who have done something to harm us we dislike most. We detest them *because* we detest them. Mrs. Vavasor and I are antagonistic; we would simply hate each other under any circumstances. How bent she was on winning that game, and I—I should have died of mortification if she had."

"Take care of her, Kathie! that woman means to do you injury of some kind before she quits this house. Whether it be for your mother's sake or your own, doesn't matter—she means to harm you if she can."

Katherine threw back her head with an imperial gesture.

"Let her! I am not afraid. If it comes to that, I may beat her at her own game, as I did five minutes ago. She can't take *you* from me, Gaston," with a little gay laugh—"can she? Anything else I fancy I can bear."

He stooped and answered her in whispered words, and Katherine's face was quite radiant as she took her place at the table.

Mrs. Vavasor followed with Mr. Dangerfield. She had risen from the table and taken his proffered arm, quite white for an instant through all her rouge. He saw that pallor beneath paint and powder.

"And you are beaten after all, Mrs. Vavasor, and by Katherine Dangerfield! Your game of chess meant more than a game of chess—is it emblematic? She's fearfully and wonderfully plucky, this cousin of mine. Will she come off victorious at other games than chess, I wonder?"

She looked up at him for one moment, and all the passion, the rage, the hatred, smouldering within her, burst forth.

"I'll crush her!" she cried in a furious whisper. "I'll crush her! And the day is very near now. This is only one more item added to the long account I owe her. She shall pay off all—the uttermost farthing, with compound interest."

"And stab through *him*," Peter Dangerfield said darkly; "the surest blow you can strike is the one that proves him the traitor and fortune-hunter he is. I believe in my soul it would be her death."

"I shall strip her of all—all—lover—father, name even. I will wait until her wedding-day and strike home then. When her cup of bliss is fullest and at her very lips I shall dash it down. And, my brilliant, haughty, high-spirited heiress of Scarswood, how will it be with you then?"

Sir John was in his place—a darkly moody host, amid the lights, the flowers, and the wines. Mrs. Vavasor was even in higher spirits than usual. Mr. Dangerfield was talkative and agreeable, Katherine was happy, and disposed to be at peace with the world and all therein, even Mrs. Vavasor. She loved, she was beloved—all life's greatest happiness is said in that. For Mr. Dantree, he was simply delightful. He told them inimitable stories of life in the Southern States, until even grim Sir John relaxed into interest, and after dinner in the drawing-room sang for them his favorite after-dinner song, "When the Winecup is Sparkling Before Us," in his delicious voice, that enchanted even those who hated him most. The piano stood

in a shadowy recess down at one extremity of the long room.—Katherine and he had it all to themselves. Mrs. Vavasor was busy with some flimsy feminine handiwork. Mr. Dangerfield sat beside her, turning over a book of photographs, and Sir John lying back in his easy-chair, kept his eyes closed as though asleep. His face wore a worn look of care—he was watching those two shadowy figures at the piano, and as he listened to this man's voice, so thrillingly sweet, as he looked at his face —the lamplight streaming on his dusk Spanish beauty, he scarcely wondered at Katherine's infatuation.

"Fairer than a woman and more unstable than water," he thought, bitterly, "and this is the reed she has chosen to lean upon through life! My poor little Kathie, and I am powerless to save you—unless—I speak and tell all. Heaven help you if this man ever finds out the truth."

"Sing me something Scotch, Gaston," Katherine said. She was seated in a low fauteuil, close beside him, her hands lying idly in her lap—her head back among the cushions. It was characteristic of this young lady that she had never done a stitch of fancy-work in her life. She was quite idle now, perfectly happy—listening to the howling of the October storm in the park, and Mr. Dantree's exquisite singing.

"Sing something Scotch—a ballad. If I have a weakness, which is doubtful, it is for Scotch songs."

Mr. Dantree heard but to obey. He ran his fingers lightly over the keys, smiled slightly to himself, and glanced half-maliciously at the girl's supremely contented face.

"How well pleased she looks," he thought. "I wonder if I cannot change that blissful expression. Many women have done me the honor to fall in love with me, but I don't think any of them were quite so hard hit as you, not even excepting Marie."

He played a prelude in a plaintive minor key, wonderfully sweet, with a wailing understrain, quite heart-breaking, and sang. His face changed and darkened, his voice took a pathos none of his hearers had ever heard before.

"A weary lot is thine, fair maid—
A weary lot is thine!
To pull the thorn thy brow to braid
And press the rue for wine.
A lightsome eye, a soldier's mien,
A feather of the blue,
A doublet of the Lincoln green
No more of me you knew,
My love!
No more of me you knew.

"This morn is merry June, I trow,
The rose is budding fain,
But she shall bloom in winter snow
Ere we two meet again!
He turned his charger as he spoke
Upon the river shore—
He gave the reins a shake, and said:
'Adieu forevermore,
My love!
Adieu forevermore.'"

It died out faint and low as the last cadence of a funeral hymn. And then he glanced at Katherine. He *had* changed the expression of that sensitive face cruelly—it lay back now against the ruby red of the velvet, as colorless as the winter snow of which he sang. He arose from the piano with a laugh.

"Kathie, you are as white as a ghost. I have given you the blues with my singing, or bored you to death. Which?"

She laughed a little as she rose.

"Your song was beautiful, Gaston, but twice too sad—it has given me the heartache. It is too suggestive, I suppose, of man's perfidy and woman's broken trust. I never want to hear you sing that again."

It was late when the two gentlemen bade good-night and left. Mrs. Vavasor took her night lamp and went up the black oaken stairway, her ruby silk trailing and gleaming in lurid splendor behind her.

"Good-night, Kathie, darling—how pale and tired the child looks. And you didn't like that divine Mr. Dantree's last song? It was the gem of the evening to my mind—so suggestive and all that. *Bonne nuit et bonnes rêves, ma belle*"—Mrs. Vavasor had a habit among her other gushing habits of gushing out into foreign languages now and then—"and try and get your bright looks back to-morrow. Don't let your complexion fade for any man—there isn't one on earth worth it. *A demain!* good-night.

"'A lightsome eye, a soldier's mien,
A feather of the blue,
A doublet of the Lincoln green,
No more of me you knew,
My love,
No more of me you knew!'"

And with a last backward glance and still singing the ominous song, brilliant little Mrs. Vavasor vanished.

Mr. Gaston Dantree rode back to his temporary home at Morecambe in very excellent spirits. What an uncommonly good-looking, fascinating sort of fellow he must be that *all* the

women should lose their heads for him in this fashion. Surely the gods who presided over his destiny must have been in a most propitious mood when they created him their bright particular star.

"I've always heard it is better to be born lucky than rich, and gad! I believe it. *I* was born a pauper. My mother vended apples in the streets of New York; and my father—well, the less said about him, the better. He bequeathed me his good looks, his voice, and his—loose-fitting morality. Until the age of eight, I ran wild about the streets; then my pretty face, and curly head, and artistic way of singing 'Oh, Susannah!' attracted the attention of Mrs. Weymore, rich, childless, sentimental, good-natured, and—a fool. I was sent to school, tricked out in velvet and ruffles, kissed, praised, petted, flattered, spoiled by all the ladies, young and old, who visited my foster mamma; and, by Jove! they've been at it ever since. Then at sixteen came that ugly little episode of the forged check. That was hushed up. Then followed the robbery of Mrs. Weymore's diamonds, traced clearly home to me. They would not overlook that. I inherited my light-fingered proclivities from my father as well as the good looks they praised; but they wouldn't take that into consideration. Then for four years there was the living by my wits—doing a little of everything under heaven. Then came New Orleans and my new, and, I flattered myself, taking cognomen of Gaston Dantree, my literary ventures, and their success in their way. And then after three years more came old De Lansac and Marie—poor little Marie. I thought I had found the purse of Fortunatus then, when, lo! the old fool must up and get married. And, as if that weren't enough, there must follow an heir, and adieu to all Marie's hopes and mine. Then I crossed the Atlantic to try my luck on this side the pond, and I believe I've accomplished my destiny at last, as lord of Scarswood, at eight thousand a year. I believe I shall be a square peg, fitting neat and trim into a square hole. Katherine's a drawback—exacting, and romantic, and all that bosh—but everything as we wish it, is not for this world below. The old gentleman will go toes up shortly. I shall take the name of Sir Dantree Dangerfield, sink the Gaston, and live happy forever after."

Mr. Dantree was still singing that ballad of the faithless lover as he ran lightly upstairs to his room. He threw off his wet overcoat, poked the fire, turned up the lamp, and saw on the table a letter.

Now a letter to the handsome tenor singer was not an agreeable sight. Letters simply meant duns or else—He snatched it up with an oath. This was no dun; it was something even worse. It was superscribed in a woman's hand, and was postmarked New Orleans.

"From Marie, by Jupiter!" he exclaimed, blankly. "Now, how the dev—ah, I have it. It came to my address in London, and the publishers have forwarded it here. Shall I open it, or pitch it into the fire unread? Deuce take all women. Can they never let a fellow alone? What a paradise earth would be without them!"

He did not throw the letter into the fire, however. He threw himself into an easy chair instead, stretched forth his splashed riding boots to the blaze, and tore it open. It had the merit of being brief at least, and remarkably to the point:

NEW ORLEANS, Sept. 16th, 1869.

GASTON:—Are you never going to write?—are you never coming back? Are you ill or are you faithless? The last, surely; it would be in keeping with all the rest. Does your dead silence mean that I am deserted and forever? If so, only say it, and *you* are free as the wind that blows. I will never follow you—never ask aught of you. No man alive—though he were ten thousand times more to me than you have been—shall ever be sued for fidelity by me. Come or stay, as you choose; this is the last letter I shall ever trouble you with. Return this and all my other letters—my picture also, *if* I am deserted. But, oh, Gaston! Gaston! have I deserved this? MARIE.

That was all. The woman's heart of the writer had broken forth in that last sentence, and she had stopped, fearing to trust herself. Mr. Dantree read it slowly over, looking very calm and handsome in the leaping firelight.

"Plucky little girl!" was his finishing comment; "it is hard lines on her, after all that's past and gone. But there's no help for it, Marie. 'I have learned to love another—I have broken every vow—we have parted from each other—and your heart is lonely now,' and all that sort of thing. I wonder if I ever had a heart! I doubt it. I'm like Minerva, a heart was left out in my make-up; I never was really in love in my life, and I don't want to be. Women are very well as stepping-stones to fortune, fame, ambition; but for love in the abstract—bah! But poor little Marie! if I ever did approach the spooney, it was for her; if I have it in me to care for anything or anybody but myself, it is for her."

And then Mr. Dantree produced a little black pipe, loaded

to the muzzle, struck a fusee, and fell back again to enjoy himself. He looked the picture of a luxurious Sybarite, lounging negligently among the cushions before the genial fire.

"And I know she'll keep her word," he muttered reflectively. "No breach of promise, no avenger on the track in this case, Gaston, my boy; all nice and smooth, and going on velvet. That's a good idea about sending back the letters and photograph. I'll act upon it at once. A married man's a fool who keeps such souvenirs of his bachelorhood loose about. And Kathie isn't the sort of girl either to stand that species of nonsense—she's proud as the deuce, as becomes the daughter of an old soldier, and as jealous as the devil!"

Mr. Dantree arose, and crossing to where his writing-case lay, unlocked it, and produced a package, neatly tied up with blue ribbon. They were letters—only a woman's letters—in the same hand as that of to-night, and in their midst a *carte de visite*. He took this latter up and looked at it. It was the face of a girl in her first youth, a darkly piquante face, with two large eyes looking at you from waving masses of dark hair—a handsome, impassioned face, proud and spirited. And Gaston Dantree's hard, coldly bright brown eyes grew almost tender as he gazed.

"Poor child!" he said—"poor little girl! How pretty she used to look in her misty white dresses, her laces, the creamy roses she used to wear, her dusk cheeks flushed, and her big blue eyes like stars! Poor little thing! and she would have laid a princely fortune at my feet, with her heart and hand, if that old bloke, her grandfather, hadn't euchred her out of it, And I would have been a very good husband, as husbands go, to little Marie, which is more than I'll ever be to this other one. Ah, well! *Sic transit*, and all the rest of it!—here goes!"

He replaced the vignette, added the last letter to the others, did them up neatly in a sheet of white paper, sealed the package with red wax, and wrote the address in a firm, clear hand:

"Mlle. MARIE DE LANSAC,
"Rue de———,
"New Orleans, Louisiana."

"I'll mail this to-morrow," Mr. Dantree said, putting it in the pocket of his overcoat; "and now I'll seek my balmy couch and woo the god of slumber. I dare say it will be as successful as the rest of my wooing."

Mr. Dantree undressed himself leisurely, as he did all things

and went to bed. But sleep did not come all at once; he lay awake, watching the leaping firelight flickering on the wall, and thinking.

"What if, after all now, something were to happen, and I were to be dished again, as I was in the New Orleans affair?" he thought. "By George! it was enough to make a man cut his own throat, or—old De Lansac's. A million dollars to a dead certainty,—Marie sole heiress, Marie dying for me. And then he must go and get married—confound him! I can't think Sir John Dangerfield is dotard enough for *that*, but still delays are dangerous. I'll strike while the iron's hot. I'll make Katherine name the day, to-morrow, by Jove. Once my wife, and I'm safe. Nothing can happen then, unless—unless—Heavens and earth!—unless Marie should appear upon the scene, as they do on the stage, and denounce me!"

And then Mr. Dantree paused aghast, and stared blankly at the fire.

"It's not in the least likely though," he continued. "Marie is not that sort of woman. I believe, by George! if she met me a week after she gets the letters back she would look me straight between the eyes and cut me dead. No—Marie never will speak—she could go to the scaffold with her head up and her big blue eyes flashing defiance, and it's a very lucky thing for me she's that sort. Still it will be a confoundedly ugly thing if she ever hears of me again either as Sir Dantree Dangerfield or the heiress of Scarswood's *fiancé*. She might speak to save Katherine. But no;" and then Mr. Dantree turned over with a yawn at last on his pillow, "who ever heard of one woman saving another. Men do, but women—never! I'll have the wedding day fixed to-morrow, and it shall be speedily."

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE THIRD WARNING.

THE rain passed with the night, and a slight frost set in with the new day. Mr. Dantree was due at a hunting party at Langton Brake, to be followed by a ball at Langton Royals. He would meet Miss Dangerfield on his way to cover, and she should fix their wedding day.

"A southerly wind and a cloudy sky proclaim it a hunting morning," Mr. Dantree hummed. "Before I am three hours older I shall put my fate to the touch, 'to win or lose it all.' I wonder if a baronet's daughter could get up her *trousseau* in three months? She won't object to naming an early day, I know: she's in love with me beyond all redemption, and I'm in love with her—eight thousand a year."

Mr. Dantree breakfasted, mounted "a red roan steed," and looking unspeakably well in his very becoming hunting costume, set off for the meet at Langton Brake.

The baronet's daughter was there before him, surrounded by half a dozen red-coats, sitting a powerful-looking black horse as though it had been an easy chair, and looking, as she always did on horseback, her best. But while she talked and laughed with her attendant cavaliers, her gaze kept ever impatiently turning in one direction, and as Gaston Dantree galloped up, a light flash of glad welcome lit the clear eyes.

"Late, Gaston; late again. I wonder if you ever were or will be in time for anything in your life. Any man who would prove himself a laggard on such a glorious morning deserves—what does he deserve, Captain De Vere?"

"The loss of Miss Dangerfield's favor, the heaviest loss I know of. A laggard in the hunting field Mr. Dantree may be, but he certainly has proven himself anything but a laggard in love."

And bowing low after this small stab, and with a sarcastic curl of his tawny-mustached mouth, the captain of the Plungers rode away. He held the handsome, silver-voiced, oily-tongued Southerner in contempt and aversion—most men did—without exactly knowing why. There are men whom men like, and men whom women like, and Mr. Dantree, happily for himself, was one of the latter.

A loud cry of "there they come" proclaimed the arrival of the hounds. The huntsman as he passed cast surly glances toward Miss Dangerfield and one or two other mounted ladies, with prophetic visions of their heading the fox, and being in the way. The hounds were put into the gorse, and the pink coats began to move out of the field into the lane—Miss Dangerfield and her dark lover with them.

A loud "Hallo" rang shrilly out, the hounds came with a rushing roar over a fence. "There he is!" cried a score of voices, as the fox flew over the ground, and with a ringing shout Katherine Dangerfield flew along on black Ilderim, steady

as a rock and upright as a dart. Her brilliant eyes were flashing now with the hunter's fire—even Gaston Dantree was forgotten. The roan flew along helter-skelter beside Ilderim for a few minutes, then fell hopelessly behind. Mr. Dantree counted neither courage nor horsemanship among his many virtues. On and on like the wind—Ilderim flew the fences—with a tremendous rush he leaped chasms and hedges, his dauntless rider taking everything before her. The master of the hounds himself looked at her in a glow of admiration—the black Arab flew over everything, scorning to turn to the right or left, and after a brilliant burst of over an hour, the heiress of Scarswood had the triumph and delight of being one of the fortunate few in at the finish—in time to see the dead fox held over the huntsman's head with the hounds hanging expectant around. She laughed —eyes and teeth flashing dazzlingly—as she received the brush from the huntsman, and the innumerable compliments from the gentlemen who crowded around the heroine of the hour.

"Yes," she said, "I can ride—about the only thing I can do. No, Mr. Dantree, I do *not* want a compliment from you, and I can't pay one either. Your roan balked shamefully, and you are the last man in. But to be late, as I said before, on all occasions, is your normal state."

"Being first in your regards I can bear the rest with philosophy, Miss Dangerfield. Fall back from those people, and rein in that black whirlwind of yours, and ride back to Langton Royals with me."

She looked at him quickly—some tone in his voice, some look in his eyes startled her.

"Gaston, something has happened!"

"Yes—nothing to be alarmed about, however. Only this—I must go back to New Orleans."

"Gaston!"

It was a sort of dismayed cry. If he had ever doubted his power over her he would have been reassured now. The glad light died out of her face as she turned to him.

"Go back to New Orleans! Why should you go back? I thought—"

"You thought I was never to go back any more. You thought this sort of pleasant existence—driving, hunting, singing, and being happy—taking no thought, like lilies of the field, etc., was to go on forever. My dear little simple Kathie! you seem to forget that though *you* are born to the purple, I am not. You forget that men must work and women must weep. You for

get that you are engaged to a poor beggar, who earns his bread by the sweat of his brow or his brains. You forget in short that I am not the heiress of Scarswood, with eight thousand per annum, or Captain De Vere, next heir to a peerage, but Gaston Dantree, Bohemian, literary hack—only too thankful if his flimsies for the New Orleans journals pay for the coat he wears and the bed he sleeps on. You forget that, my dear, impetuous little girl, but, by Jove, I don't!"

"And what's all that got to do with it? Why can't things go on as they are? Why can't you stop at Morecambe until—" Miss Dangerfield stopped abruptly.

"Until our wedding day—is that what you mean, Kathie? Ah! but you see that seems such a very indefinite period. Mr. Talbot was kind enough to invite me to run down to his place in Sussex for a week's August fishing, and I was to repay his hospitality by singing songs. August has passed, October is here, and—so am I still. And, unfortunately, singing is such an unsubstantial mode of payment, even the finest tenor voice is apt to pall upon a Sussex Squire, after three months' incessant listening to it. I had a letter last night from New Orleans—not a pleasant letter—and it comes to one of two things now, either to go back to Louisiana and resume my quill driving, or—" Mr. Dantree paused and looked at her —"*or*," he repeated with that smile of his, the baronet's romantic daughter thought the most beautiful on earth—"*or* Kathie."

"Yes, Gaston?"

"Or you must marry me out of hand. Do you hear, Kathie? —take me for better or worse, and support me afterward. That's what it comes to in plain English. One may be in love ever so deeply, but one must have three meals per diem and pay the tailor and boot-maker. I have just money enough to last precisely two months and a half—I've been totting it up. After that the work-house stares me in the face. I'll defy the minions of the newspaper, Kathie, if you say so, and I'll go to the Castleford Arms and wait until the happy day comes, that makes you all my own. If not—why then—" Mr. Dantree paused and produced his cigar-case. "You'll permit me, I know, Kathie? You're awfully sensible on the subject of cigars, and I've been thinking so deeply ever since I got that confounded letter, that my brain—such as it is—is dazed. I need a smoke to support me under all this."

Then there was silence, while they rode on slowly in the rear of the hunting party—Mr. Dantree philosophically puffing

his cigar, and Katherine, her cheeks flushed with very unwonted color, and lips sealed with still more unwonted silence.

"Well," he said, as the turrets and peaked gables of Langton Royals bore in sight, "I don't want to be importunate, my dear, but suspense isn't a pleasant thing. When a man is under sentence, the sooner he hears his doom and knows the worst, the better. Am I to go to New Orleans, to risk all that may come to part us forever, or am I to—"

"Stay, Gaston!"

Mr. Dantree drew a long breath of great relief. For one moment he had doubted—for one agonizing moment the eight thousand a year seemed trembling in the balance.

"My loyal little girl! I shall thank you for this when two score people are not looking on. I am to stay and send the New Orleans editors *au diable*, and the wedding day will be—when, Kathie? My princely fortune will keep me about two months, and allow me a new suit of clothes, I suppose, to be made happy in. When, Kathie—when—when—when?"

"Gaston, I don't know. It is so horribly sudden. Good Heavens! only two months! One can't prepare."

"Oh yes, one can. Import the *trousseau* from London or Paris. They'll send you on the thousand and one things brides seem to require in a week. Be rational, Kathie; that objection is overruled. Name the next."

"It is easily named. Papa will never consent."

"Ah, now you have come to the hitch in the matter. I think it very likely the ancient warrior may put in his veto. But it is for you to overrule that. You're not the bright, clever little darling I give you credit for if you can't do it easily. In the bright lexicon of youth, you know, there's no such word as fail. You can do it, and you've got to do it yourself, by Jove! I faced the music once, and I'd rather keep my countenance averted from the melody for the future. He does the heavy father to perfection, and I never had a taste for private theatricals. Suppose I spare your blushes, and fix the day myself? Suppose I select New Year's eve? We couldn't wind up the old year in a jollier manner than by being married, and enjoying ourselves in Paris for the rest of the winter. Come, now, my darling, don't object. Bring the noble baronet round to reason, and make your Gaston the happiest man on this reeling globe on New Year's eve. Quick—oh, hang him! Here comes De Vere. Quick, Kathie; yes or no?"

"Yes."

She just had time to flutter forth that one little word, when the captain of the Plungers Purple rode up on his gray charger to solicit the second waltz at the ball that night.

"I used to write my name first on your list, Miss Dangerfield," the captain said, plaintively, "but all that's over now," with a glance at Dantree; "and I must be resigned to my fate of second fiddle. 'Twas ever thus, etc. I trust hunting in this damp air has not impaired your voice for 'The Wine Cup is Sparkling,' Mr. Dantree?"

They rode on to Langton Royals together—Katherine unusually silent. She glanced furtively now and then at her two cavaliers. How much the handsomer her lover was. Such easy, negligent grace of manner; how well he talked; how well he sang; what a paragon he was among men. What a contrast Randolf Cromie Algernon De Vere, riding beside him, was, with his heavy, florid, British complexion, his ginger whiskers, his sleepy, blue eyes, and his English army drawl. He was the son of a dead peer, and the brother of a live one; but his nose was a pug, and his hands and feet were large, and he had never thought, or said, or done a clever thing in his life.

"And papa wanted me to marry *him!*" Miss Dangerfield thought, with unutterable contempt; "after seeing Gaston, too! How impatient he is to have our wedding day fixed—how he seems to dread losing me. And people call him mercenary and a fortune-hunter. I shall speak to papa to-morrow, and he shall consent."

The hunting party dined at Langton Royals. Miss Dangerfield's French maid had come over from Scarswood with her young lady's ball toilet, and when Mr. Dantree entered the brilliantly lighted ball-room and took a critical survey of his affianced wife, he was forced to confess that great happiness made the dark, sallow heiress of Scarswood very nearly handsome. She wore—was she not a heroine and a bride elect?—a floating filmy robe of misty white, a crown of dark-green ivy leaves on her bright chestnut floating hair—all atwinkle with diamond dewdrops—her white shoulders rose exquisitely out of the foamy lace—her great, brilliant eyes had a streaming light, a faint flush kindled her dusk cheeks.

"Have you noticed the little Dangerfield, Talbot?" Captain De Vere remarked to his friend, the Squire of Morecambe. "She's in great feather to-night, growing positively good-looking, you know. See how she smiles on that shrewd little fellow, Dantree. Why can't we all be born with Grecian profiles and

tenor voices? Seems a pity too she should be thrown away on a cad like that—such a trump of a girl as she is, and such a waltzer. Look at her now floating away with him. Clearest case of spoons I ever saw in my life."

Captain De Vere leaned against a pillar, pulled his leonine mustache, and watched Miss Dangerfield and her lover circling down the long room with gloomy eyes. It would have been contrary to all the principles of his life to fall in love—it was the proud boast of the Plungers that they never were guilty of that weakness, but still—oh, hang it all! Why couldn't that fellow keep his confoundedly handsome face and diabolically musical voice for transatlantic heiresses, and not come poaching on British manors? Why couldn't he marry a Yankee wife, who talked through her nose, and whose father had amassed a fortune selling groceries, and not mix the best blood in Sussex with the plebeian puddle in his veins? Why couldn't she keep true to her order? why didn't Sir John kick the fellow downstairs when he had the audacity to demand his daughter's hand? Sir John, the proudest old martinet in the army. A fine precedent to be set to the daughters of the county gentry—the son of a Yankee butcher or blacksmith lording it in Scarswood and taking his place among the patricians of Sussex, with the best blood in England in their veins, and an ancestry that ran back to the conquest and Norman William.

"And the cad's a scoundrel, besides," the captain thought, glowering with human ferocity; "vain as a woman of his pretty face and voice, with no more affection for that sentimental, hero-worshiping little girl of seventeen than *I* have—not half so much, by George! She'll marry him and come to grief—the worst sort—mark my words!"

The first waltz ended, the captain's turn came. The unusual exertion of thinking had fatigued the young officer's intellect; the physical exertion of waltzing with Miss Dangerfield would counteract it. And Miss Dangerfield was such a capital dancer, such a jolly little girl every way you took her! How she laughed, how she talked, what a clear, sweet, fresh, young voice she had, how bright were her eyes, how luxurious her brown, waving hair,—not pretty, you know, like half the other girls in the room, with wax-work faces and china-blue eyes, but twice as attractive as the prettiest of them—one of those girls whom men look after on the street, and ask their names—a siren with a sallow complexion and eyes of starry luster.

"She's got brains, and the rest have beauty—I suppose that's about it—and beauty and brains never travel in company. She is far the cleverest little girl of my acquaintance, and, if you notice, it's always your clever women who marry good-looking fools. Egad! I wish I had proposed for her myself. Marriage is an institution I'm opposed to on principle. 'Britons never shall be slaves,' and so forth—and what's your married man but the most abject of slaves? I believe I've been in love with her all along and never knew it. 'How blessings brighten as they take their flight!' When I could have had her I didn't want her; when I can't have her, I do."

"Oh!" Katherine sighed, in ecstasy, "that was a delicious waltz! I was born to be a ballet-dancer, I believe—I could keep on forever. Captain De Vere, you're the first heavy dragoon I ever knew who didn't disgrace himself and his partner when he attempted round dances. Is that Mr. Dantree singing in the music-room? Yes, it is; and you have a soul attuned to the magic of sweet sounds—don't say no; I'm sure you have—so have I; come!"

Yes, Mr. Dantree was singing; that is what he was there for; his voice for the past ten years had been the open sesame that threw wide the most aristocratic portals, where else he had never set foot. A little group of music lovers were around him, drinking in the melody of that most charming voice. Mr. Dantree was in his element—he always was when surrounded by an admiring crowd. This song was a Tyrolean warble, and the singer looked more like an angel than ever, in a white waistcoat and tail coat.

"May Old Nick fly away with him!" growled Captain De Vere, inwardly, "and his classic countenance, and Mario voice! What a blessing to society if he became a victim to small-pox and chronic bronchitis! It's no wonder, after all, that little Kathie, a beauty-worshiper by nature, is infatuated. Well, my man, what is it?"

For a six-foot specter, in plush and knee-breeches, had appeared suddenly, and stood bowing before them.

"I beg your pardon, capting—it's Miss Dangerfield's maid as wishes to speak to Miss Dangerfield for a hinstant, hif hagreeable."

"Ninon!" said Katherine—"what does she want?—where is she? Oh, I see her! Excuse me a moment, Captain De Vere."

The French maid was standing just outside the door of the music room, holding a small white parcel in her hand.

"Well, child," her mistress said, impatiently—the little French girl was five years her senior—"what do you want?"

"It's this packet, mademoiselle; John Thomas found it on the floor of the gentleman's cloak room, and he thinks it belongs to Mr. Dantree."

"Indeed! And why does John Thomas think so?"

"Because, mademoiselle, it is addressed to New Orleans. Will mademoiselle please to take it and look?"

Katherine took the little white package and looked at the address. Yes, beyond doubt, it was Gaston's hand.

"Mlle. MARIE DE LANSAC,
"Rue de ———,
"New Orleans."

There was a moment's pause. The girl stood expectant—the young lady stood holding the package in her hand, looking strangely at the address. It was Gaston's writing, no doubt at all about that; and who was "Mlle. Marie De Lansac," of New Orleans, and what did this package contain? Letters, surely—and this hard, cardlike substance, a photograph no doubt. Mr. Dantree had told her his whole history as she supposed, but no chapter headed "Marie De Lansac" had appeared. And as Katherine stood and looked, her lips set themselves in a rigid line, and a light not usually there, nor pleasant to see, came into her gray eyes—the green light of jealousy.

"This package belongs to Mr. Dantree, Ninon; John Thomas was quite right. Here, tell him to—or no," abruptly, "I'll give it to Mr. Dantree myself."

The package was small, her hand closed firmly over it, as she walked back to the music room. Mr. Dantree had just finished his Tyrolean chorus, and was smiling and graciously receiving compliments. He made his way to Katherine's side and drew her hand within his arm, as one who had the right.

"My dear child," he said, "what has happened now? why, oh why, that face of owl-like solemnity! What's gone wrong?"

The large, crystal-clear, honest gray eyes were fixed on his face, keenly.

"Yes, my love," he said, "what is it?"

"Gaston!" abruptly and with energy, "did you ever tell a lie?"

"Hundreds, my darling," responded Mr. Dantree, with promptitude; "thousands, millions, and likely to do so again. What an absurd question! Did I ever tell a lie? It sounds like the catechism. As if any man or woman lived who *didn't* tell lies!"

"Speak for yourself," the girl said, coldly; "*I* don't and I can't conceive of any man or woman of honor doing so. You see Captain De Vere there?"

"I'm thankful to say I do not at this moment—military puppy!"

"Military puppy he may be—falsehood-teller, I know he is not; he is incapable of falsehood, dishonor, or deceit."

"Like the hero of a woman's novel, in short," sneered Gaston Dantree, "without fear and without reproach. My dear child, men and women who never tell lies exist in books 'written with a purpose,' and nowhere else. But what are you driving at, my severe little counsel for the prosecution? Let's have it without further preface."

"You shall, Mr. Dantree. *Who* is Marie De Lansac?"

Mr. Dantree was past-master of the polite art of dissimulation; no young duke born to the strawberry-leaf coronet could be more unaffectedly *nonchalant* than he. His handsome olive face was a mask that never betrayed him. And now, with a start so slight as to be scarcely perceptible, with so faint a paling of the dark face that she failed to see it, he turned to her, calm and cool as ever.

"Marie De Lansac? Well, I know a young lady of that name in New Orleans. Who is she, you ask? She's granddaughter of a French gentleman of that city, and I gave her singing lessons once upon a time. My dear little Kathie, *don't* annihilate me with those flashing gray eyes of yours. There isn't any harm in that, is there? There's no need of the green-eyed monster showing his obnoxious claws."

He met her suspicious gaze full, and discovered for the first time what an intensely proud and jealous nature he had to deal with. He was chill with undefined fear, but he smiled down in her face now with eyes as clear and innocent as the eyes of a child.

"Is this all?" she asked, slowly; "or is it only one of the many lies you find it so necessary to tell?"

"On my honor, no; it is the truth; as if I could speak anything else to you. But how, in Heaven's name, Kathie, did you ever hear of Marie De Lansac?"

She did not reply; she still held the package; she still looked at him distrustfully.

"You gave her singing lessons, this Miss De Lansac?" slowly. "She is young, I suppose?"

"She is."

"Handsome, no doubt?"

"Well, yes, she is handsome—not the style *I* admire, though."

"Never mind your style—you admire nothing but plain young women with sallow skins and irregular features—that is understood. Mr. Dantree, do you correspond with this young lady?"

"Certainly not. Katherine, what *do* you mean?"

The careless look had left his face, the pallor had deepened. Who had been talking to her—what had she found out? Good Heavens! to have eight thousand a year quivering in the balance like this.

"What I mean is this, Mr. Dantree. This is your writing, I believe, and I infer you are returning Miss De Lansac's letters and picture. This packet fell out of your coat-pocket in the cloak-room. You never corresponded with Miss De Lansac—you only gave her singing lessons? That will do, Mr. Dantree—don't tell any more falsehoods than you can help."

She placed the packet in his hand. He had never thought of that. His face changed as she looked at him for a moment. In spite of the admirable training of his life he stood before her dumb—condemned out of his own mouth.

The steady, strong gray eyes never left his face—her own was quite colorless now.

"Not one word," she said, in a sort of whisper; "and look at him. It is true, then—all they have said. He is false—false!"

"I am *not* false!" Mr. Dantree retorted, angrily. "Don't be so ready to condemn unheard. If you will do me the honor to listen, I can explain."

She laughed contemptuously.

"Not a doubt of it, Mr. Dantree! You could explain black was white if one listened to you long enough. I'm afraid I have listened to you too long already. How many of the million lies you are in the habit of telling have you told me?"

"Not one—not the shadow of one! For shame, Katherine! to taunt me with idle words spoken in jest. I have told you the truth concerning Miss De Lansac—the simple truth—

so far as I am concerned. I gave her music lessons—I never cared for her—no, Katherine, not one jot—but she—that is—she—oh, it is quite impossible to explain!"

"She fell in love with you! is that what your modesty will not permit you to say, Mr. Dantree? She fell in love—this poor Miss De Lansac—with her handsome singing-master, whether he would or no?"

"Yes, then!" Gaston Dantree said, folding his arms and looking at her with sulky defiance, "since you make me say it Think me a coxcomb, a puppy, if you will, but she did fall in love with me, and she *did* write to me, since I left New Orleans I never answered those letters. I told you the truth when I said I did not correspond with her. Last night I came across them by chance, and as your plighted husband I felt I had no right even to keep them longer. I made them up as you see, to return to her, feeling sure that after *that*, she would never address me again. I never told you of her—why should I? She was simply nothing to me, and to tell you that a young lady of New Orleans took a fancy to me, and wrote me letters, would not be very creditable to *me*."

And then Mr. Dantree paused—still standing with folded arms—posing beautifully for a model of wounded pride.

She drew a long breath.

"And this is all?" she said, slowly.

"All, Miss Dangerfield—on my sacred honor!"

'If I could only think so! If I only dared believe you!"

"You are complimentary, Katherine! When you doubt my word like this it is high time for us to part."

He knew her well—how to stab most surely.

"Part!" her sensitive lips quivered. "How lightly he talks of parting! Gaston! you see—I love you wholly—I trust you entirely. You are so dear to me, that the bare thought of any other having a claim on you, be it ever so light, is unendurable. Will you swear to me that this is true?"

He lifted his arm—it gave the oath proper stage effect.

"By all I hold sacred, I swear it, Katherine!"

It was not a very binding oath—there was nothing on the earth below, or the sky above, that Mr. Gaston Dantree held sacred. But it is easy to believe what we most want to believe As the old Latin saw has it, "The quarreling of lovers was the renewing of love." Mr. Dantree and Miss Dangerfield kept devotedly together for the rest of the night, and peace smiled again, but the "cloud no bigger than a man's hand" had risen,

that was speedily to darken all the sky. Katherine's perfect trust was gone—gone forever. "Had he told her the truth, or was it all a tissue of falsehoods? Had another woman a claim upon him, and was it her fortune he loved, as everybody said—not herself?"

"And, powers above!" thought Mr. Dantree; "what am I to do with a jealous, exacting wife? What a savage look there was in her eyes for one moment; the Dangerfields were ever a bitter, bad race. A game where two women claim one man must be a losing game for the man in the end. I begin to see that."

At five in the morning the ball at Langton Royals broke up. Miss Dangerfield was driven home through the cold blackness that precedes the dawn, shivering in her furred wraps. She toiled slowly and wearily upstairs. She had danced a great deal, and was tired to death. She had been in wild spirits the first half the night, now the reaction had come, and she looked haggard and hollow-eyed, as she ascended to her room.

It was all bright in that sanctuary of maidenhood. A genial fire blazed on the hearth, her little, white bed, with its lace and silken draperies and plump, white pillows looked temptingly cosey. A softly cushioned sleepy hollow of an easy chair was drawn up before the fire. Katherine flung herself into it with a tired sigh.

"It is good to be home," she said. "Take off these tire-some things, Ninon—quick—and go."

The deft-fingered French girl obeyed. The floating, brown hair was brushed and bound for the pillow, the lace and tulle, the silk and diamond sprays were removed, and her night-robe donned, and Katherine thrust her feet in slippers, and drew her chair closer to the fire.

"Anything more, mademoiselle?"

"Nothing, Ninon; you may go."

The maid went, and the heiress was alone. She felt tired and sleepy and out of sorts, but still she did not go to bed. She lay back in her chair and listened to the bleak morning wind howling through the trees of the park, with closed, tired eyes.

"Marie De Lansac! Marie De Lansac!" She seemed to hear that name in the wailing of the wind, in the ticking of the little Swiss clock, in the light fall of the cinders, and, with it ringing still in her ears, she dropped asleep.

And, sleeping, she dreamed. She was floating somewhere

down a warm, golden river, overhead a sunlit, rosy sky, all the air quivering with music. And as she floated on and on in a delicious trance she saw the golden sky blacken, she heard the winds rise, and the river darken and heave. The music changed to the wild song of a siren, luring her on to the black depths below. Down, down she felt herself sinking, the cold waters closing over her head. She looked up in her death agony, and saw her lover standing safe on the shore and smiling at her throes. She stretched out her arms to him.

"Help, Gaston, help!" she strove to cry, but the rising waters drowned her voice, and the shrill wind bore them away. The siren song grew louder. She could hear the words, "False as fair! false as fair!" And still the waters rose. The white arms wreathed round her lover—standing smiling there—a beautiful, deriding face mocked her over his shoulder.

"I am Marie De Lansac," said the taunting voice, "and he is mine."

Then the bitter waters of death closed over her head, and with a gasping cry she started up awake—the fatal words yet ringing in her ears, "False as fair! false as fair!"

The chill, gray light of the October dawn filled the room, the fire had died out black on the hearth, and she was cramped and cold. Even in her dreams that warning came to her! She drew out her watch and looked at the hour. Only seven, but Katherine Dangerfield slept no more.

---

## CHAPTER X.

### BEFORE THE WEDDING.

"MARRIED on New Year's Eve! Married on New Year's Eve, Katherine! Do I hear you aright? Is it possible you really mean this?"

Sir John Dangerfield, seated in dressing-gown and slippers before the study fire, laid down his *Times*, and blankly asked this question. His daughter stood behind his chair, keeping her face steadily averted.

"Let me look at you, child—come here. Let me see if this is my little Kathie who sang her doll to sleep yesterday.

and who comes to me now and asks to be married on New Year's Day. Ah, you cannot—you do not mean it after all."

"Papa, I do," Katherine cried, desperately, feeling again what a cruel thing it had been of Gaston to subject her to this ordeal; "at least I don't, but he—that is—oh, papa, I have explained already."

"You have repeated Mr. Gaston Dantree's plausible pretexts, of which I don't believe one word. He dared not face me again; he ordered *you* to come to me and obtain my consent to your marriage on New Year's Eve. Coward! craven coward!"

"Papa, don't. You misjudge him—he is no coward—even you have no right to call him so. Oh, papa, how *can* you be so unkind to him, to me. You were so harsh to him when he spoke to you before, and you knew he would not, could not retort in kind. You wouldn't like it yourself—to sit still and be abused. You must not call Gaston such hard names. Even from you I cannot bear it."

But in the depths of her heart, even while she fought desperately for her absent lover, she felt it to be true. He *was* a coward.

"Hear her," the baronet said, with suppressed intensity; "hear her take his part against *me*—this man whom she has not known two months. Well, well, it is the reward the old always receive from the young."

Two white arms clasped his neck, two impetuous lips stooped down and kissed him.

"Papa, darling, is it generous of you to say this? You know I love you dearly, dearly; but, papa, I love him too. I can't help it; I don't know why; I only know I do with all my heart."

He looked at her tenderly—the hard bitterness of his mouth relaxing into a smile, half-sad, half-cynical.

"My little one," he said, "my little one, you don't know why. Shall I tell you? A little for his dark eyes, a little for his silken hair, a little for his seductive voice and sugary words, and a great deal—oh, my romantic Kathie—for your own poetical imagination. If you saw Gaston Dantree below the surface for an hour you would scorn him your life long. But you take this good-looking Lousianian at his own valuation, and invest him with a halo of nobility all your own, and set him up and worship him. My daughter, take care, take care. Your god will crumble to clay before your eyes; and what is

left then? Believe me, little Kathie, there is more needed to make a wife happy than long lashes and a musical voice."

Katherine looked up and met her father's eyes full for the first time, her lips compressed into a resolute line. An hour ago she had seemed to him a wayward little girl—he knew now, for the first time, he had a woman to deal with—a woman in love, and resolute to have her way.

"You treat me as though I were ten years old and asking a new plaything. Papa, I love Gaston, he wants me to be his wife, and I have promised. A promise given should be a promise kept. I will marry him, or go to my grave unmarried."

"Then Heaven help you! My years on earth will not be many—don't interrupt me, Katherine; I know what I am saying—and when I am gone, and you are left to that man's mercy, I say again Heaven help you!"

"He has given you no earthly reason to say it!" Katherine exclaimed, "and it is not like you to be unjust. It is a shame, papa! a shame! You know nothing wrong of him—nothing. Even the grim, pitiless English law takes the prisoner in the dock to be innocent until he is proven guilty. You speak of him as though he were a villain, double-dyed! I repeat, it is a shame to slander the absent in this way, and a soldier who has fought for his country, as you have, ought to be the last to do it. You wrote to New Orleans to find out his character—did the answer justify such dark suspicions as these?"

"The answer left me as much in the dark as ever. Mr. Dantree's character in New Orleans is simply *nil*—no one knew anything much either to his credit or discredit. You defend your lover stanchly, Katherine. I don't think the worse of you for it, but it won't do. Even you, my child, eloquent as you are, with all your special pleading, cannot make a hero of Gaston Dantree."

"I don't want to make a hero of him; he suits me well enough as he is. As he is, with all his faults, whatever they may be, I am willing to take him—to hold to him all my life; and be very sure, whatever that life may prove, no one alive shall ever hear me complain of him."

"I believe you," her father said, quietly; "you're not a model young lady by any means, but you deserve a much better husband than Gaston Dantree. Child! child! you are hopelessly infatuated—I might as well talk to the trees waving yonder outside the window as to a romantic girl in love. But

think a moment—think how little you know of this man. Who is to prove he hasn't a wife already out yonder in the Southern States?"

"Papa!" But there was a sharp, sudden pang in her voice as she uttered the indignant cry. "*Marie De Lansac!*" the name that had haunted her dream that morning came back.

"Ah! Kathie, flying into a passion will not prove his worth. I repeat, we know nothing of him—nothing but what he has chosen to tell or invent. Do you really believe, my poor Donna Quixote, that if some freak of fortune deprived you to-morrow of Scarswood and its rent-roll, he would prove faithful to the love he has vowed? If you were penniless—as he is—do you believe he would ever make you his wife?"

She met his sad gaze, full; but she was white to the lips.

"I believe it, papa. I know how I would act by him; poverty—disgrace even—would only make me cling the more devotedly to him. I would take his part against all the world, and why should I think him the less generous? Papa, it may be your duty, but you torture me! What is the use of saying such things except to make me miserable?"

But it was not her father's words that made her miserable—it was the doubt in her own heart, the conviction that he spoke the truth. Not all her insane infatuation could convince her that this man was either loyal or true. She had been brought up in a peculiar way enough, this impulsive Katherine, and if there is any excuse to be made for her willful perversity, it lies in that. Motherless at the age of three, left to a doting father, spoiled by Indian nurses, indulged in every caprice, she had grown up headstrong and full of faults. The Indian colonel had taught her to scorn a lie as the base crime of a coward; and taught her to be as true as steel, loyal, generous, and brave; and she knew in her inmost heart that Gaston Dantree was none of these things—was twice as unstable as water. Only her girl's fancy had gone out to him, and it was too late to recall the gift.

Her father drew her to him and kissed her.

"I will say no more—not one word; and yet it is a cruel kindness. Do you know what I should have done, Kathie, when that fellow came here to ask your hand? I should have said, 'She is there; take her if you will. She is quite ready and capable of running away with you to-morrow, if you ask her; *but* as long as I live, not one farthing will she ever receive from me—not though she were starving. I will never forgive

her; I will never see her. She is in love with you; take her and when the honeymoon is over—starve! I mean this, Mr Dantree, and we Dangerfields know how to keep our word Kathie, he would never have set foot again within this house, and you—you would hate your father. I don't think I could bear that, and so, oh, child! marry him, if you will, on New Year's Eve—what does a month more or less matter?—and may the good God keep you, and defend you from the fate of a broken-hearted wife!"

She made no reply; her face was hidden on his shoulder

"I fear for your future, my child!—I fear! I fear!' the old soldier said, with strange pathos—"I foresee more than I dare tell. Kathie, listen! Do you"—his steady voice faltered a little—"do you think you could bear to be poor?"

"Poor, papa?" she lifted her head, and looked at him in surprise.

"Yes, Katherine; to be poor—not as we were poor in India, with servants to wait upon us, and a colonel's pay to live on; but if I were to die, and it may be soon—child, be still—and you were left alone in the world, friendless and portionless, to earn your own living as other girls do—do you think you could bear that?—to eat poor food? to wear poor clothing? to labor for others?—that is the sort of poverty I mean."

She gazed at him, lost in wonder.

"Poor, poor! I, a baronet's daughter, the heiress of Scarswood! Papa," bursting into a laugh for the first time—"what nonsense are you talking? It is impossible for me to be poor."

"But suppose it were not"—he spoke with feverish eagerness, shifting away from the gaze of the bright, wondering eyes—"suppose it were possible—suppose such a fate overtook you—could you bear it?"

"Sir John Dangerfield," the young lady responded, impatiently, "I don't want to suppose it—I won't suppose such a preposterous thing! No, I couldn't bear it—there! I would rather die than be poor—living on crusts—wearing shabby dresses—and working for insolent, purse-proud common rich people. Papa, I would just quietly glide out of life in a double dose of morphine, and make an end of it all. But what's the use of talking such rubbish? I'm Katherine Dangerfield, heiress; it is about as likely that I shall go up to the moon, like Hans Pfaal, and live there away from everybody, as that I shall ever turn shop-girl and poor."

He set his lips hard beneath his iron-gray mustache, and his soldier's training stood him in good stead now. Of the sharp pain at his heart his face showed no sign.

"And you consent, papa—you dear, good-natured old papa?" the girl said, her cheek close to his, her lips to his ear; "you do consent! I am only seventeen, and silly, no doubt, but let me be happy in my own way. I can't help liking Gaston—I can't indeed—and I want to trust him—to believe in him. You'll let me, won't you? You won't say bitter, cynical things any more. And you know you won't lose me, as you would if I married any one else. You'll only gain a son instead—and we'll all live together here, as the fairy tales say—happy forever after.

He sighed resignedly, disengaged himself, and arose.

"'When a woman will she will,' etc. Have your own way, Katherine. Let the wedding be on New Year's Eve. I give you *carte blanche* for the *trousseau*—order what you please. I can say no more than that. I will make the best of a bad bargain, since it is inevitable, but I can't like him—I never can. Marry him if you will, but I would almost sooner see you dead than give your fate into his hands. Keep him away from me—I had rather not meet him. And Katherine—" a pause.

"Well, papa," she spoke rather sadly. It seemed very hard that the two beings on earth whom she loved best could like one another no better than this. Her father was standing with his back to her, looking out of the window at the beeches tossing their striped branches in the high autumnal gale.

"Yes, papa—what is it?"

"Don't offend Mrs. Vavasor." He spoke with an effort "You don't like her, and you take no pains to hide it. Katherine, it won't do."

"Why not, papa?"

"I can't tell you why—only she is your guest; as such she should be treated with courtesy."

"Well, I do try to be courteous—that is, I try to endure her; but papa, she's simply unendurable; it stifles me to live in the house with her. I don't know why—I suppose we're antagonistic, as Gaston says, but my flesh creeps when she comes near me, just as it does when I meet a toad. She's like a serpent, papa—one of those deadly cobras we used to have out in India—with her glittering eyes, and her sharp, hissing voice, and her noiseless, gliding walk. Why can't you give her all the money she wants and pack her off about her business?"

"Because—well, because the world is civilized, and she is our guest. Let us respect the sanctity of the bread and salt. She has a hold upon me—I may admit that much—and it places me in her power. If I or you offend her, Katherine, it is in her power to injure us both more than I can say. It is impossible to explain; I can only say for the present, treat her civilly for my sake."

"I will try. For your sake, papa, I would do anything."

"Except give up Gaston Dantree! Well, well! it is the way of the world—the way of women—a very old way, too. And now go—I think I'll settle my mind by reading the *Times* after all this. Arrange everything—buy the wedding dresses, let the wedding guests be bidden, and when the hour comes I will be ready to give my daughter away to a man of whom I know nothing. That will do, Kathie—I'd rather have no thanks. Let the subject of Mr. Dantree be dropped between us—it is a subject on which you and I can never agree, though we talked to the crack of doom."

Katherine laid her hand on the handle of the door. There was a swift swish of silk outside. She flung it wide. Had that odious little wretch, Mrs. Vavasor, been listening? But the passage was deserted, and a tall Indian cabinet hid the little crouching figure completely.

Miss Dangerfield rode out under the open sky and sunny downs with her affianced, and Mr. Dantree simply heard that papa had consented that the marriage should take place upon New Year's Eve—no more. But he could easily infer the rest from Katherine's clouded face.

"The sharp-sighted old baronet has been abusing me," reflected Mr. Dantree; "he has taken my gauge pretty accurately from the first. I wonder how it is, that my face, which makes all women fall in love with me, makes all men distrust me? Is it that women as a rule are fools, and the other sex are not? What an awful muddle I nearly made of it by carrying that confounded packet of letters about. Katherine's a prey to the green-eyed monster already, and will be for the rest of her life. I suppose it is in the eternal fitness of things, somehow, that plain women should be always savagely jealous, especially when they have remarkably handsome husbands. Before the year ends I will be the son-in-law of Scarswood Park, and the husband of eight thousand a year! Gaston Dantree, my boy, you're a cleverer fellow than even I gave you credit for."

There was a dinner-party that evening at Scarswood, and Mr.

Dantree, with a fatuous smile, made known to all whom it might concern that the happy day was near. Mrs. Vavasor's black eyes sparkled with their snakiest light—the rustling silk twisted, and twined, and gleamed about her in more serpentine coils than ever. She flashed a glance across at Peter Dangerfield, who sat, with spectacles over pale, near-sighted eyes, on the opposite side. And Captain De Vere stroked again his big, heavy, dragoon mustache, and shot sharp glances of suppressed ferocity at the smiling bridegroom elect.

"Hang the beggar! I'd like to throttle him, with his self-satisfied grin and confident airs of proprietorship. I suppose Sir John's falling into his dotage—I can't account for it in any other way, poor little fool," with a look at Katherine; "if he treats her as I know he *will* treat her after marriage, I'll thrash him within an inch of his life, 'fore George! I wish I had asked her myself."

The wedding day was announced, Katherine was congratulated, and a little before midnight, with her lover's parting kiss still on her lips, singing softly, she went up to her room. Draped with rose-silk and laces, the carpet wreaths of rosebuds on snow, puffy silken chairs, a Swiss musical-box playing tinkling tunes, fire-light and waxlight gleaming over all—how pretty—how pleasant it looked. And Katherine, in her dinner-dress of rich mazarine blue, and sapphire ornaments set in fine gold, sank down in the puffiest of the chairs with a tired sigh.

There came a soft tap at the door, not the tap of Ninon. Katherine lifted her dreamy eyes from the fire.

"Come in," she said.

The door opened, and Mrs. Vavasor entered.

She too still wore her dinner-dress—the rich sea-green silk glowed in the light far behind her. The diamonds that were *not* from the Palais Royal flashed splendidly on neck, and arms, and ears and fingers. Her shining, luxuriant black hair floated over her shoulders, and the smile that rarely left her was at its brightest on her face.

"Am I an intruder?" she asked, gayly. "What blissful visions of ante-nuptial felicity have I frightened away? You will forgive me, I know, my pet. I had to come. Kathie, dear, you don't know how glad I am your wedding day is so near.'

She took both the girl's hands in hers. Katherine's first impulse was to snatch them impatiently away, but she remem

bered her father's warning. This odious, fulsome, fawning creature had some mysterious power over him; for his sake she must be civil.

"You are very good," but, despite the best intentions, Miss Dangerfield's voice sounded cold. "Will you sit down, Mrs Vavasor?"

"No, love; I will stay but a moment. See, it is midnight. Weird hour!" with a shrill laugh. "Are there ghosts, do you know, at Scarswood? Such a dear, romantic old house ought to be haunted, you know, to make it complete. I suppose every house, as the poet says, where men and women have lived and died, is haunted, and we all carry our ghosts with us through life. But I won't turn prosy and metaphysical on this happy night. Ah! darling Kathie, what an enviable girl you are—how brightly your life has been ordered! Seventeen, rich, flattered, caressed, and beloved! I suppose you have never had a single wish ungratified in your life, and in two months you marry the man you love with your whole heart—a man like one's dreams of the Olympian Apollo. And others of us go through life, and don't find one completely happy day. It is the old nursery story over again: 'This little pig goes to market, and this little pig stays at home.' Katherine Dangerfield, what a happy girl you ought to be!"

"I am happy, Mrs. Vavasor."

Still Mrs. Vavasor stood, and looked at her. How strange the gleam in her eyes, how strange the smile on her lips! The firelight sparkled on her emerald silk, on her costly jewels, on her shining laces, on her coils of satin black hair. Katherine had never known fear in all her life—but something in that woman's face made her shrink away in a sort of terror.

"Mrs. Vavasor," she said, rising and turning white, "what is it you have come here to say to me?"

The widow laughed aloud—that shrill, metallic laugh that rasped upon the ear.

"What have I come to say? Why, to wish you joy, of course, and to tell you I am going away."

"Going away!" Ah, Kathie, what a poor dissembler you are! The light of unutterable relief and gladness lights all your face at the words.

"Going away, my dearest; and if I dared harbor so inhospitable a suspicion, I should say you looked glad to hear it. But you're not, are you, Kathie, love—and you will speed the parting guest with real regret? Yes, my pet, I am going—

never to come back—well, not more than once again, perhaps —on your wedding day. For I think I must really come to your wedding, little Kathie, and wish that beautiful Mr. Dantree joy. How well he loves you, Kathie; he is one of those artless, frank kind of men who wear their hearts on their sleeves, for all the world to read. Yes, I leave Scarswood just one week preceding your wedding day. You look as if you did not understand—but you are ever so much relieved after all. By the bye, Katherine, you grow more and more like your mother every day. Just at this moment, as you stand there in the firelight, in that lovely blue silk and sapphires, you are fearfully and wonderfully like her. Would you believe it Miss Dangerfield—your mother once prevented *my* marriage?"

"Mrs. Vavasor?"

"Yes, my dear," the little widow said in her airiest manner, "prevented my marriage. It was all for the best, you know—oh, very much for the best. I am not speaking of Mr. Vavasor, poor dear—your mother never knew him. I was quite young when my little romance happened, a year or two older than you are now. He was scarcely older than myself, and very handsome—not so handsome as that divine Gaston, though, of course. And I was—well, yes—I was just as deeply in love as you, my impetuous darling, are this moment. The wedding day was fixed, and the wedding dress made, and at the last hour your mother prevented it. It is nearly twenty years ago, and if you will believe it, the old pain and disappointment, and anger, and mortification comes back now, as I talk, almost as sharply as they did then. For I suffered—as I had loved—greatly. I have never seen him for twenty long years, and I never want to now. He is alive still, and married, with grown-up sons and daughters, and I dare say, laughs with his wife—a great lady, my dear—over that silly episode of a most silly youth. And I—I eat, drink, and am merry as you see, and I forgave your mother, as a Christian should, and married poor, dear Mr. Vavasor, and was happy. Your mother died in my arms, Kathie, and now I am coming to her daughter's wedding."

She laid her hand—burning as though with fever—on the girl's wrist, and fixed her black, glittering eyes strangely upon her.

"Look for me on your wedding day, Katherine—I shall be there!"

The girl snatched her hand angrily away. "Mrs. Vavasor!"

she cried out, "what do you mean? Why do you look at me so? You frighten me!"

"Do I?" with her mocking laugh. "Now I never meant to do that. I don't mean anything, how could I?—but best wishes for you. Good-night, Katherine—bride elect—heiress of Scarswood—baronet's daughter—good-night, and pleasant dreams.

"'The morn is merry June, I trow,
The rose is budding fain;
But she shall bloom in winter snow
Ere we two meet again.
He turned his charger as he spoke,
Upon the river shore,
He gave the reins a shake, and cried
Adieu forevermore,
My love!
Adieu forevermore!'"

A last derisive glance of the black eyes, a taunting smile—singing Mr. Dantree's song—Mrs. Vavasor vanished.

Hours and hours after Katherine sat very still, very pale, and very unlike her bright, dashing, defiant self, before the flickering fire. What did it all mean? Mysteries in books were very nice, the thicker and blacker the better; but in everyday life—well, they were exasperating. What power did this woman hold over her father?—why could he not speak out and tell *her?* If he could not trust the daughter who loved him, whom could he trust! What did Mrs. Vavasor mean by her sneering taunts, only half hidden, her innuendo, her delusive smiles and glances, her ominous song? Was it in the power of this dark, evil woman to part her and her lover?

"No," she said proudly, lifting her head with that haughty grace that was her chief charm; "no man or woman on earth can do that. Nothing in this world can come between Gaston and me, unless he should prove—"

"False!" Not even to herself could she repeat that word. She got up shivering a little.

"It grows cold," she thought; "I will go to bed, and to-morrow I shall tell papa, and beg him once more to explain. I cannot endure that woman's presence much longer."

If early rising be a virtue, Miss Dangerfield possessed it. She might dance all night, until "the wee sma' hours ayont the twal," but she was prepared to rise at six next morning, as fresh as the freshest. When Sir John came out on the terrace for his morning smoke, he found his daughter pacing up and down slowly in the pale, chill sunlight. A scarlet bournous

wrapped her, and her dark face looked wan and somber from out its glowing folds.

"You here, Katherine!" the baronet said, as he stopped and kissed her. He was very gentle with her of late; there was a sort of sad, abnormal tenderness in his face now. It did surprise him to find her here so early, but looking again at her, he saw how heavy the bright eyes were, how slow the elastic foot-fall, the shadows on the tell-tale face. "What is it, Kathie?" he asked. "You look as though you hadn't slept last night. Has anything gone wrong?"

"Well, no, papa; nothing exactly gone wrong, perhaps: but I feel unhappy, and cross, and mystified. I didn't sleep last night, and it's all owing to that detestable woman. Light your cigar, papa, and I will tell you while we walk up and down." She clasped both hands round his arm, and looked up with dark, solemn eyes. "Papa, I want you to send her away. She is a wretch—a wicked, plotting, envious wretch! I was happy last night—I don't think I ever was happier in my life. What business had she to come and spoil it all? I hate to be unhappy—I won't be unhappy! and, papa, I insist upon your sending the odious little killjoy away!"

His bronzed face paled perceptibly; an angry glance came into his steel-blue eyes.

"You mean Mrs. Vavasor, I presume? What has she done?"

"Done!" Katherine repeated, with angry impatience—"she has done nothing—she is too cunning for that; and it isn't altogether what she says, either; it's her look, her tone, her smile, that insinuates a thousand things more than she ever utters. That horrid, perpetual simper of hers says, plainer than words, 'I know lots of things to your disadvantage, my dear, and I'll tell them, too, some day, if you don't use me well.' I hate people that go smirking through life, full of evil and malice, and all uncharitableness, and who never lose their temper."

"You seem to have decidedly lost yours this morning, my dear. May I repeat—what has Mrs. Vavasor done?"

"This, papa: she came to my room last night, instead of going honestly to bed like any other Christian, and began talking to me about my—mother."

Sir John Dangerfield took his cigar suddenly from between his lips, a dark red flash of intense anger mounting to his brow.

"About your mother!" he repeated, in a tense sort of voice. "What did Mrs. Vavasor say about your mother, Kathie?"

"She said, for one thing, that my mother once prevented her marriage. Now, did she?"

"Not that I am aware of. Was that all?"

"Well, that was all she accused her of, but there were volumes implied. My mother died in her arms, she said, and she had long ago forgiven her. Papa, if ever I saw a devil in human eyes I saw one in hers as she said it. She hated my mother; she hates me; and if it is in her power to do me or you any harm, she will do it before she leaves Sussex as surely as we both stand here."

"Katherine, for Heaven's sake—"

"She will, papa!" Katherine cried, firmly. "All the harm she can do us she will do. But is it in her power to really harm us? The will is there fast enough, but is the way?"

"My child," he said, and there was a sob in every word, "it is in her power to ruin us—to ruin *you*."

Katherine looked at him—very pale, very grave, very quiet. You could see at once how this impulsive girl, ready to cry out lustily with impatient anger over little troubles, would bear great ones.

"Then Heaven help us!" she said, "if that be true. I don't understand, and it seems to me you will not explain until the blow falls. Perhaps I could bear it better if I knew beforehand what I had to endure. Just now it seems strangely impossible. You are a wealthy baronet and I am your only child—how can a woman like that injure or ruin us? Papa," suddenly, "is there any flaw in your right of succession to Scarswood—is there any heir whose claim is better than your own?"

He looked at her, a look that haunted her for many a day, with eyes full of trouble.

"And if it were so. If there were a claimant whose right was better than my own—if some day, and very soon, Scarswood were taken from us, and we went out into the world poor, disgraced, and penniless, how would it be then. I have asked you before, I ask you again—could you bear poverty, Katherine? Could you bear to leave Scarswood and its splendors, and go forth among the women and men who work, and be happy?"

She set her lips close.

"I could go, papa, I suppose," she answered, in a hard sort of voice. "We can endure almost anything, and people don't

break their hearts for any loss in this nineteenth century. But —happy—that is quite another thing. I have told you many times, and I repeat it now, I would rather die than be poor."

She stopped, and there was dead silence while they walked up and down the long stone terrace. Up in the bright October sky the sun rained its golden light, and up in the breezy turrets the great breakfast-bell began to clang; very fair Scarswood park looked in the amber radiance of the crisp early morning —the green and golden depths of fern, the grand old oaks, and elms, and beeches, the climbing ivy of centuries' growth, the red deer racing, and the stately old mansion, with its eastern windows glittering like sparks of fire. Katherine's eyes wandered over it all—she had learned to love every tree, every stone in the grand old place.

"Papa," she said, at last, a sort of wail in her tone, "must we go—must we give up all this? Was I right after all, and is this the secret Mrs. Vavasor holds?"

"Supposing it were—what then, Kathie?"

"Then," her eyes flashed, "order her out of the house within the hour, though we should follow her the next."

"What—and brave ruin and exposure when we may avert them?"

"You will not avert them. That woman will not spare you one pang she can inflict. And if we must go"—she threw back her head with right royal grace—"I would rather we walked out ourselves, than wait to be turned out. So that I have you and Gaston left, papa, I can endure all the rest."

His mouth set itself rigidly under his beard, and the soldier-fire came into his eyes.

"Let us go in, papa," Katherine said, resolutely, "and when breakfast is over, give Mrs. Vavasor her *congé*. It is for my sake you have been afraid of her—not for your own. Well, I hate poverty, I know, but I hate Mrs. Vavasor much more. Send her away, and let her do her worst."

"She shall go!"

"Thank you, papa. It was not like you to be afraid of anybody. I will breathe freely again once she is outside of Scarswood. Shall she go to-day?"

"To-day—the sooner the better; and then, Kathie—"

"Then, papa, when you and I and Gaston go, it will be together. If we are to be poor, I will work for you—turn actress, or authoress, or artist, or something free, and jolly, and

Bohemian, and try and remember Scarswood, and its glories, only as people remember beautiful, impossible dreams."

"My dauntless little girl! But we won't leave Scarswood!—no, not for all the little painted women this side of perdition. She shall go, and we will stay, and we *will* let her do her worst. While I live at least you are safe—after that—"

"But, papa!" with a sort of gasp, "that other heir—"

The baronet laughed.

"There is no other heir, my dear—Scarswood is mine, and mine only—Mrs. Vavasor shall go, and we will have our wedding in peace, and if in the future any great loss or worldly misfortune befall you, let us hope Gaston Dantree's husbandly love will make up for it. Yes," he lifted his head, and spoke defiantly, as though throwing off an intolerable burden, "come what may, the woman shall go!"

They found her in the breakfast parlor when they entered, looking out over the sunlit landscape, and waiting impatiently for her breakfast. Late hours did not agree with Mrs. Vavasor—it was a very chalky and haggard face she turned to the baronet and his daughter in the garish morning light. Her admirers should have seen her at this hour—the seamed and sallow skin—the dry, parched lips—the sunken eyes with the bistre circles—even the perennial smile, so radiant and fresh under the lamps, looked ghastly in the honest, wholesome sunlight.

"Good-morning, dear Sir John—good-morning, dearest Kathie. How well the child looks after last night's late hours—as fresh as a rosebud, while I—but alas! I am five-and-thirty, and she is sweet seventeen. Well, regret for my lost youth and good looks shall never impair my appetite; so 'queen rose of the rosebud garden of girls,' the sooner you give me a cup of coffee, the sooner my nerves will be strung for the battle of life that we all poor wretches fight every day."

In dead silence Katherine obeyed—in dead silence the baronet took his place. Her fate was sealed, her days at Scarswood numbered. She saw it at a glance.

"I frightened her last night," she thought, "and she has been laying in a complaint to papa, this morning, and papa has plucked up courage from despair, and I am to get the route to-day. What a fool I grow! Having waited nineteen years, I might surely have waited two months more. Well, as I must hold in my hand that promised check for ten thousand pounds before I cross the threshold, what does it signify? I shall go

to London or Paris—my own dear, ever new, ever beautiful Paris—until the last week of the old year, and enjoy myself instead of moping to death in this dull, respectable English house, among dull, respectable English people. It is just as well as it is."

Mrs. Vavasor was as agreeably conversable as usual during breakfast, but as three quarters of an hour's steady talking to people who only answer in tersely chill monosyllables is apt to be wearisome even to the sprightliest disposition, her dreary yawn at rising was very excusable.

"I believe I shall postpone my shopping expedition to Castleford after all this morning, and go back to bed. Oh dear!" another stifled yawn, "how sleepy I am. And we dine this evening, do we not, dearest Kathie, at Morecambe?"

"Mrs. Vavasor," Sir John interrupted with cold, curt decision, "before you go to Castleford or to sleep, be kind enough to follow me into my study. I have a word to say to you."

He led the way instantly; Mrs. Vavasor paused a moment and looked over her shoulder at Katherine with that smile the girl hated so.

"I think I understand," she said, slowly. "My time has come. If I shall *not* be able to put in an appearance at the Morecambe dinner party this evening, you will make my apologies, will you not, dearest? And give my love to that perfectly delicious Mr. Dantree."

And then she went, humming a tune, and entered the study, and stood before the grim old baronet.

He shut and locked the door, took a seat, and pointed imperatively for her to take another. All the time her eyes followed him with a hard, cold glitter, that seemed to set his teeth on edge. He looked her full in the face, and plunged headlong into his subject.

"Harriet Harman—Mrs. Vavasor—whatever name you please, you must leave this house at once! You hear—at once!"

"I hear," she laughed. "It would be a dull intellect indeed, my dear Sir John, that could fail to comprehend your ringing military orders. I must go, and at once. Now that is hard when I had made up my mind not to stir until after Christmas. Your house is elegant, your cook perfection, your wines unexceptionable, your purse bottomless, and your friends eminently respectable. I'm not used to respectable

people, nor full purses, and I like Scarswood. Now, suppose I insist upon spending Christmas here, after all?"

She folded her arms, and looked at him exactly as she had done on the night of her arrival.

"I will suppose nothing of the sort—you *must* go."

"Ah! I must! I like people, do you know, who say a thing, and stick to it. Well, you're master here, of course, and if you insist upon it, what can a poor little helpless widow do? But, Sir John, I wonder you're not afraid."

"Beyond a certain point fear ceases, and desperation comes. I can endure your presence, your sneers, your covert threats no longer. You are no fit companion, as I told you before, for Katherine—a woman noted as the most notorious gambler of Baden and Homburg during the past ten years. The girl hates you, as you know, and you—how dared you go to her room as you did last night, and talk of her mother? How dared you do it?"

His passion was rising—there was a suppressed fury in his tone and look, all the stronger for being so long restrained. The widow met it with a second scornful laugh.

"How dared I do it? You have yet to learn what I dare do, Sir John. Don't lose your temper, I beg—it's not becoming in a soldier, a gentleman, and a baronet. How dared I talk to Katherine of her mother? Now, really, Sir John, that sounds almost wicked, doesn't it? What more filial—what more sacred subject *could* I talk to a child upon than the subject of her sainted mother?"

"Harriet, I thought I would never stoop to ask a favor of you again, but now I do. Tell me—"

"That will do, Sir John—I know what is coming, and I won't tell—never! never! never! It would be poor revenge indeed if I did. What you know now is all you ever will know, or she either. I'll leave Scarswood to-day, if you like. After all, hum-drum respectability and stupid stuck-up country families are apt to pall on depraved Bohemian palates used to clever disreputable nobodies. Yes, I'll go, Sir John. Give me that ten thousand pound check. *Mon Dieu!* the life I mean to lead in Paris on that; delightful, respectable, orthodox—and I'll shake the dust of Scarswood off my wandering feet—forever!"

"Forever! You swear never to trouble us more?"

"I will swear anything you like, baronet. Oaths or words—it's all the same to Mrs. Vavasor."

"How can I trust you? How am I to tell that after I pay you the exorbitant price you ask for your secrecy, you will not go to Peter Dangerfield and betray me?"

Mrs. Vavasor laid her hand on her heart.

"On the honor of all the Vavasors, whose *sang-azure* flows in those veins, I swear it! You must take my word, baronet, and chance it. Have I not promised—am I not ready to swear—'by all the vows that ever men have broken'? What more do you want? Give me the money, and let me bid you—'oh, friend of my brighter days!'—one long, one last farewell!"

He went to his writing-case, and handed her a crossed check for ten thousand pounds. Her eyes flashed with intense delight as she looked at it.

"Ten thousand pounds! Ten thousand pounds! and I never had ten thousand pence before in all my life. Sir John, a million thanks. May you be happy!—may your shadow never be less! May your children's children (meaning the future little Dantrees) rise up, and call you blessed! Those aged eyes of yours will never be pained by the spectacle of my faded features more. I go, Sir John—I go—and I leave my benediction behind."

She went up to her room singing. Ninon was summoned, a chambermaid was summoned, and Mrs. Vavasor worked with right good-will. Two little shabby portmanteaus had held Mrs. Vavasor's wardrobe last September—now four large trunks and no end of big boxes, little boxes, and hand-bags were filled. And with the yellow radiance of the noonday sunshine bathing park, trees, turrets, and stately mansion in its glory, Mrs. Vavasor was whirled away to Castleford station.

She looked back as the light trap flew through the great gates, and under the huge Norman arch.

'A fair and noble inheritance," she said; "too fair by far to go to her mother's daughter. Your sky is without a cloud, now, but when next I come, my brilliant, happy, haughty Katherine, look to yourself. This morning's work is your doing—I am not likely to forget that."

Mrs. Vavasor was gone. The news fell upon Mr. Peter Dangerfield like a blow. As suddenly and mysteriously as she had at first appeared, she had vanished, and where were all her vague promises and bewildering insinuations now?

Katherine was to be married, the wedding day was fixed, he

had been bidden to the feast. She had insulted him, scorned him; he must pocket his rage, and live without his revenge. He was not prepared to break the law and commit a murder, and how else was he to pay off this insolent heiress, and her still more insolent lover? Mrs. Vavasor was gone, and all his hopes of vengeance went with her.

Something might happen, to be sure, between this and the wedding day. Gaston Dantree might be shown up in his true colors, as the unprincipled fortune-hunter he was. People die suddenly, too, occasionally. Katherine might break her neck even, in one of her mad gallops over highways and by-ways. While there is life there is hope.

He went to Scarswood pretty frequently now—saw the lovers together happy and handsome, made himself agreeable, always in a cousinly way, and the weeks sped on. The *trousseau* was ordered, all was joy and gayety at the great house. Christmas week came and nothing had happened.

He sat moodily alone one evening—Christmas Eve it chanced to be—before his solitary bachelor fire, brooding over his wrongs. His solitary, bachelor dinner stood on the table—he had been invited to a brilliant dinner party at Scarswood, but he was growing tired of going to Scarswood, and hoping against hope. Nothing ever befell this insolent pair—Katherine grew happier—brighter—more joyous every day, and that upstart, Dantree, more invincibly good-looking. Nothing happened; luck was dead against him; nothing ever would happen. This night week was the wedding night—and what a life spread before those two in the future. It drove him half-mad to look at them at times. And he—he must go on grubbing like a worm in the clay, for ever and ever. Katherine and Katherine's children would inherit Scarswood, and all hope was at an end for him. He was only a rickety dwarf. Never while life remained would he forget or forgive those cruel words.

"If I live for sixty years to come, I'll only live in the hope of paying you off, my lady," he muttered, clenching his teeth; "it's a long lane, indeed, that has no turning! Curse that Mrs. Vavasor! If she knew anything, why didn't she tell me?"

There was a tap at the door.

"Come in," he called, sulkily; "it's time you came to clear away that mess." He thought it was the servant, but instead a lady—dressed in black—and closely vailed, entered.

He arose in surprise, and stood looking at her. Who was this? She shut the door, turned the key, advanced toward him, and held out her hands to the fire.

"It *is* cold," she said, "and I have walked all the way from the station. Have you dined? What a pity! And I am hungry. Well, give me a glass of wine at least."

He knew the voice. With a suppressed exclamation he drew nearer.

"It is," he said—"surely it is—"

"Mrs. Vavasor!" She flung back her vail and met his glance, with the old smile, the old malicious expression. "Yes, it is Mrs. Vavasor, come all the way from Paris to see you, and keep her word. A promise should be held sacred—and I promised you your revenge, did I not? Yes, Mr. Dangerfield, I have travelled straight from Paris to you, to tell you what is to make your fortune, and mine—Sir John Dangerfield's secret!"

---

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE WEDDING NIGHT.

WITH a fierce, low cry of intense delight, Peter Dangerfield grasped her by the wrist, his thin face close to hers, and flushed with eager joy.

"You will tell me!" he almost gasped—"you mean it this night!—you will tell me to-night!"

"To-night. Let go my wrist, Mr. Dangerfield; you hurt me. Be civil enough to hand me a chair; now a glass of wine—or brandy, if you have it. Ah! this is the true elixir of life!"

She sat down before the fire, put up her little Paris gaiters on the fender, lay back luxuriously, and took the glass of French brandy he offered her.

"You are sure there are no eavesdroppers in your establishment, *mon ami?* I don't care about being overheard."

"There are none."

She drew forth from her purse a slip of written paper—Peter Dangerfield's promise to pay her ten thousand pounds when Scarswood became his.

"You recognize this, Mr. Dangerfield, and are still willing to abide by it?"

"Perfectly willing. For Heaven's sake, don't keep me in this fever of suspense and curiosity—speak out!"

She replaced the slip of paper, finished the brandy, and produced a rose-scented cigarette.

"I always smoke when I talk, if possible, and the story I have to tell is a somewhat lengthy one. Won't you load, and light up also?—I see your little black pipe there on the chimney-piece. No? You're too anxious, I perceive, and nobody can enjoy a pipe or manilla, and listen thoroughly at the same time. Well, before I begin, I must extort another promise. No matter what I tell you, you are not to speak of it until I give you leave. Don't look alarmed—your prohibition will not last long—only until Katherine Dangerfield's wedding-day. Is it a promise?"

"It is. Go on—go on!"

"Draw closer, then."

He obeyed, and little Mrs. Vavasor, leaning back in the easy chair, shoes to the fire, cigarette in mouth, began, fluently and at once, the story she had come to tell.

---

The Christmas festivities at Scarswood were very gay indeed, and Mr. Peter Dangerfield missed a very pleasant evening by staying away. Perhaps, though, on the whole, he enjoyed himself quite as much in his bachelor lodgings at Castleford, *tête-à tête* with Mrs. Vavasor. The long drawing-rooms were ablaze with light, and festooned with ivy and mistletoe, and gleaming with scarlet hollyberries. A very large company were assembled—it was an understood thing that Miss Dangerfield appeared in public no more until she appeared as a bride.

She was looking very well to-night—her large eyes full of lustrous light, her animated face dimpling ever into radiant smiles. Her silken robe of white, shot with palest rose, blushed as she walked: large Oriental pearls clasped back the floating brown hair, and shone in cloudy splendor on her slim throat. Not handsome—never that—but bright with health, youth, and perfect happiness.

Since the day of Mrs. Vavasor's departure, the days and weeks lay behind her in a golden mist. Time never flew so fast before

"How noiseless fall the feet of time
That only tread on flowers!

The only thorn in her rose-crown had been removed—papa looked contented, or if not contented, resigned—Gaston was all in the way of a devoted Romeo the most exacting Juliet could wish. Then there had been the *trousseau* to order—a trip to London to make, endless new dresses, and bonnets, and presents, and altogether Christmas Eve had come with magical quickness. On New Year's Eve—just one week from to-night—she would be Gaston's wife, and the happiest bride the wide earth held. They were to be married at eleven in the forenoon in Castleford Church. Edith Talbot to be first bridesmaid, and her brother chief groomsman, and after the wedding breakfast, the "happy pair" were to start on their honeymoon journey—a long, delightful continental trip, which was to extend far into the spring. Then would come the return, the bonfires, the bell-ringing, the feasting of tenantry, and she and Gaston would settle down seigneur and châtelaine of Scarswood, and life would go on forever a perpetual round of London seasons, presentations at court, Paris winters, autumns at Scarswood, operas, balls, and all the salt of life.

That was the programme. "Man proposes"—you know the proverb. The ante-matrimonial horizon just at present looked cloudless—a violet sky set with gold stars—not a cloud in all its dazzling expanse. And five miles away at Castleford, a man and woman sat plotting her life-long misery, disgrace, and ruin.

Mr. Dantree was in great force to-night—his voice, and looks, his whole worldly wealth, at their best. He had been the world's football a long time—a scape-goat of society, fighting his way inch by inch, and now the goal was won. Fortune such as he had never dared dream of or hope for had come to him—eight thousand a year, and a title in prospective. And all, thanks to his suave, olive-skinned beauty and flute-like voice.

"Only one week more, Gaston, *mon fils*," he said to himself, exultantly, as he whirled homeward with the Talbots, "and then let Fate do her worst—she can't oust me from Scarswood and my wife. Unless—always unless—unless Marie should take it into her jealous head to come over here and hunt me up. I wonder what she said or did when she got all her letters back. I know what she thought; there could be no two opinions on that subject. Poor, passionate, proud little beauty! What an unmitigated scoundrel I am, to be sure! The nearer the wedding day draws the more I seem to think of her—the

fonder I grow of her—all because I've given her up forever, I suppose."

But fondness for any human creature was not a weakness Mr. Dantree would ever allow to stand in his way to fortune. Jealous and exacting as nature had made the baronet's daughter—her accepted lover gave her no shadow of excuse for either. He played his rôle of Romeo to perfection; if it bored him insufferably she never saw it; and now—it was only one week, and once her husband, why all this untiring devotion might reasonably cool down a trifle, and the continual "tender nothings" of courtship give place to the calm friendliness of humdrum married life.

"She can't expect a fellow to dangle at her apron-strings all her days," Mr. Dantree thought: "if she does she's mistaken—that's all. I'm ready to call all the gods to witness that I adore the ground she treads on, before the words are said, and the nuptial knot tied; but afterward, my bonnibelle, you'll have to take it for granted or do without. Men love most, the wiseacres say, before marriage; women most after. How will it be with me, I wonder, who don't love at all?"

It was long past midnight when the carriage of the last guest rolled away from the hospitable portals of Scarswood, and the "lights were fled, the garlands dead, the banquet hall deserted." And Katherine, trailing her brilliant silk after her, her jewels gleaming in the fitful light, eyes shining, and cheeks flushed, went up to her room. Through the oriel window at the head of the stairs the full winter midnight moon shone gloriously. The Bloody Hand, and the crest of the Dangerfields—a falcon rending a dove—shone out vividly through the painted panes. A black frost held the earth in hands of iron; the skeleton trees waved gaunt, striped arms in the park; the wild December wind whistled shrilly up from the coast, and overhead spread that blue, star-studded, moonlit sky. Katherine leaned against the glass and gazed up at that shining silver orb, and her thoughts drifted away from her own supreme bliss to that other Christmas ever so many hundred years ago, when the first anthem was sung by the angels over the blue hills of Galilee.

"Katherine!" Her father's door opened, and her father's voice called. "You will take cold to a dead certainty, standing there. I thought you had gone to your room."

"I'm going, papa—I'm not in the least sleepy—I never am sleepy, I think, on bright, moonlight nights like this. I wonder if my brain is touched like other lunatics at the full of the

moon. Why are you not in bed? Papa!" with a sudden cry of alarm—a sudden spring forward, "you are not well!"

His face was of a strange, livid hue, there was a continual nervous twitching of the muscles, and his eyes had a murky, bloodshot look.

"Papa, darling! what is it? Are you ill?"

"Not very well, I fear. I have not been well for days, but I feel worse to-night than usual. And I think I ought to tell you—if anything should happen." He paused, and put his hand to his forehead in a confused sort of way. "My head feels all wrong somehow to-night. Katherine, if you're not sleepy, come in—I have something of importance to say to you."

She followed him, in some wonder and more alarm. His face had changed from its dull pallor to dark red, his voice sounded incoherent and husky. What did it all mean? She entered his room, watching him with wide, wondering eyes.

"Sit down," he said, impatiently shifting away from her glance, "and don't stare in that way, child. I don't suppose it's anything to be alarmed about, only—I think I ought to tell. You're going to be married, and you ought to know. Then the burden and the secrecy will be off my conscience, and you can tell him or not, as you please. That will be your affair, and if he deserts you—" He stopped again, again pressed his hand hard over his forehead, as though the thread of his ideas had broken. "There's something queer the matter with my head," he half muttered: "I don't seem able to talk or think somehow to-night."

"Then I wouldn't try, papa," Katherine interrupted, more and more alarmed; "you are looking dreadfully. Let me ring for François to see you and send for the doctor. I am sure you are not fit to be up."

"No, no—don't send—at least not yet. I have made up my mind to-night, and, if I don't tell you now, I may never summon courage again. You ought to know, child—you ought to know. You are not safe for an hour. It is like living over a lighted mine, until that woman is dead. You ought to tell him—that fellow—Dantree, you know. If he deserts you, as I said, better to do it before the wedding day than after. I know it is the money he wants—I know he's a coward, and a humbug, and a fortune hunter, and it may be the greatest mercy for you, child, if he does leave you before the wedding day."

Katherine started to her feet.

"Papa," she cried passionately, "this is too bad—too cruel! I thought you were never going to speak against Gaston again—you told me you would not—surely he has done nothing to deserve it. This day week is my wedding day, and you talk of his deserting me. Papa, if such a thing happened—*could* happen—I would kill myself—I tell you I would! I would never survive such disgrace!"

He sank into a chair in a dazed, helpless sort of way.

"What shall I do?" he said wearily; "what shall I do? If I had only told her years and years ago! Now it is too late."

She stood and looked at him, pale with wonder and vague alarm.

"Told me what? Is it the secret that Mrs. Vavasor holds? Why not tell me, then? Whatever it is, I can bear it—I can bear anything, only your hard words of Gaston, your talk of his deserting me. Tell me, my father—I'm not a child or a coward. I can bear it, whatever it is."

"You think so, but you don't know—you don't know! You hate that woman, and you are so proud—so proud! You cannot bear poverty—you told me that—and I—what can I do? I cannot save you from—"

His incoherent words died away—his head fell back. Katherine sprang to his side with a scream of terror. Another instant and she flew to the bell, ringing a peal that nearly tore it down. Oh! what was this?

His face had grown purple—his whole form rigid—what he had feared so long had befallen at last. He was stricken with apoplexy.

The room filled with frightened servants. After the first shock, all Katherine's senses came back. She dispatched a man at once to Castleford for the family doctor. Sir John was conveyed to bed, undressed, and all the restoratives they knew how to use applied. All in vain. With the dawning of the Christmas day, the stalwart old soldier lay before them, breathing stentoriously, and quite senseless.

Doctor Graves and his attendant, a young man, Mr. Otis, arrived, and pronounced the fit apoplexy at once. They sent the pale girl in the festal dress, the shining pearls, and the wild, wide eyes out of the room, and did their best for the master of that grand old house. But they labored in vain, the long hours wore away—and still Sir John lay rigid and senseless where they had first laid him.

White as a spirit, almost as cold, almost as still, Katherine went up to her room. She made no attempt to change her dress, to remove her jewels. She had loved this most indulgent father very dearly—the possibility that he could be taken from her had never occurred to her. Only yesterday morning he had ridden with her over the downs, only last night he had sat at the head of his table and entertained his guests. And now—he lay yonder, stark and lifeless—dead already for what she knew.

She could not rest. She left her room, and paced up and down the long corridor. He was not dead—she could hear his loud breathing where she walked. She could not cry; tears, that relieve other women, other girls of her age, rarely came to Katherine. She felt cold and wretched. How drearily still the great house was! Would those two doctors never open that door and let her in to her father! What had he been trying to tell her?—what dreadful secret was this that involved her life, and which made his so miserable? He had talked of Gaston deserting her. The wedding must be postponed now, and postponed weddings were always ominous. How was it all going to end? She shivered in her low-necked and short-sleeved dress, but it never occurred to her to go for a wrap. She stood and looked out of the oriel window once more. Morning was breaking—Christmas morning—red and golden, and glorious in the east. The first pink rays of the sunrise glinted through the leafless trees, over terrace and glade, lawn and woodland. Outside the gates the carol singers were blithely chanting already; new life—new joy everywhere without and within, the lord of this stately mansion, of this majestic park, lay dying, it might be.

But it was not death. The door opened presently, and the pale, keen face of Mr. Otis, the assistant, looked out.

"Sir John has recovered consciousness, Miss Dangerfield," he said, "and is asking for you."

"Thank God!" Katherine's heart responded, but the dreary oppression did not lift. She went into the sick room, knelt down beside the bed in her shining robes, and softly kissed the helpless hand.

"You are better, papa?"

But Doctor Graves interrupted at once.

"You may remain with Sir John, Miss Dangerfield, but neither of you must speak a word. Danger is over for the present, but I warn you the slightest excitement now or at any future time may prove fatal.

The eyes of the stricken man were fixed upon her with a strange, earnest wistfulness He tried feebly to speak—his fingers closed almost convulsively over hers. She bent her ear to catch his words.

"Send for Hammersly—I must make my will."

She kissed him soothingly.

"Yes, papa, darling, but not now. There's no hurry, you know—all present danger is over. You are to be very still, and go to sleep. I will stay by you and watch."

"You will drink this, Sir John," Doctor Graves said, authoritatively, and the sick man swallowed the opiate, and, with his hand still clasped in Katherine's, fell asleep.

Dr. Graves departed. Mr. Otis remained; Katherine kept her vigil by the bedside, very pale in the sunlight of the new day. Mr. Otis watched her furtively from his remote seat. Hers was a striking face, he thought, a powerful face—a face full of character.

"That girl will be no common woman," he thought; "for good or for evil, she's destined to wield a powerful influence. You don't see such a face as that many times in life."

The weary moments wore on. The Christmas morning grew brighter and brighter. The house was still very quiet. Outside the wintry sunshine sparkled, and the trees rattled in the frosty wind. The pale watcher lay back in her chair, paler with every passing moment, but never offering to stir. How white she was, how weary she looked. The young physician's heart went out to her in a great compassion.

"Miss Dangerfield, pardon me, but you are worn out. There is no danger now, and you may safely trust Sir John to my care. Pray let me prevail upon you to go and lie down."

She opened her eyes, and looked at him in some surprise, and with a faint smile.

"You are very kind," she said gently, "but I promised to stay here until he awoke."

There was nothing more to be said—Miss Dangerfield's tone admitted of no dispute. Mr. Otis went back to his seat, and listened to the ticking of the clock and the sighing of the December wind.

It was almost noon when Sir John awoke—much better, and quite conscious. His daughter had never stirred. She bent over him the instant his eyes opened.

"Papa, dear, you are better?"

"You here still, Kathie?" he said feebly. "Have you never been to bed at all?"

"No, Sir John," Mr. Otis interrupted, coming forward · "and I must beg of you to use your influence to send her there. Her long vigil has quite worn her out, but she would not leave you."

She stooped and kissed him.

"I will go now, papa. Mr. Otis and Mrs. Harrison will stay with you. I do feel a little tired, I admit."

Sir John's attack seemed but slight, after all. He kept his bed all next day, but on the third was able to sit up.

"And I don't see any necessity for postponing our wedding, Katherine," Mr. Gaston Dantree said. "Since by New Year's Eve Sir John will be almost completely restored."

"But he will not be able to drive to the church with me, Gaston," Katherine argued. "Dr. Graves will not permit him to leave the house for a fortnight, and besides, the excitement."

"Katherine," her lover interrupted decidedly, "I will *not* have our marriage postponed—the most unlucky thing conceivable. If the governor isn't able to go to church at Castleford, and give you away, why let's have the ceremony here in the house. If the mountain can't come to Mahomet, why Mahomet can go to the mountain. A wedding in the house is a vast deal pleasanter to *my* mind than in public at Castleford, with all the tagrag of the parish agape at the bride and groom, and all Castleford barracks clanking their spurred heels and steel scabbards up the aisles, putting us out of countenance."

Katherine laughed.

"My dear bashful Gaston! the first time I ever dreamed that anything earthly could put you out of countenance! Well, I'll ask papa, and it shall be as he says."

Miss Dangerfield did ask papa, and rather to her surprise received an almost eager assent.

"Yes, yes," he said feverishly. "Dantree's right—a postponed marriage *is* the most unlucky thing on earth. We won't postpone it. Let it be in the house as he suggests, since my driving with you to church is an impossibility. Since it must be done, 'twere well 'twere done quickly! Let the summer drawing-room be fitted up, and let the ceremony be performed there."

Mr. Peter Dangerfield had been a daily visitor at Scarswood ever since his uncle's illness—no nephew more devoted, more

anxious than he. The baronet listened to his eager inquiries after his health, his son-like anxiety, with a cynical smile.

"If I were dead there would be one the less between him and the title—you understand. I have no doubt Peter is anxious that—I should never recover."

"Something's happened to Peter, papa," answered Katherine thoughtfully, "he's got quite a new way of talking and carrying himself of late. He looks as if some great good fortune had befallen him. Now what do you suppose it can be?"

"Great good fortune," Sir John repeated, with rather a startled face. "I think you must be mistaken, Katherine. I wonder," very slowly this, "if—if he—has been in communication with Mrs. Vavasor since her departure."

For Mrs. Vavasor's presence in Castleford was still a profound secret. She had taken lodgings in the remotest and quietest suburb of the town. She never ventured abroad by day, and had assumed an alias. She and Mr. Dangerfield kept tryst in the evenings, in lonely lanes and deserted places, and no one save himself dreamed of her presence.

But three days now to the wedding day, and those three flew apace. It had been arranged that since, contrary to all precedent, the marriage was to be performed at Scarswood, it should also take place in the evening, to be followed, in the good old-fashioned way, by a supper and ball, and the bridal party start next day for the Continent. The hour was fixed for ten, and half the county invited.

Sir John's progress toward strength was very slow. Some secret anxiety seemed preying on his mind and keeping him back. He watched his idolized darling flying up and down stairs, dashing, bright as the sunshine itself, in and out of the room, singing like a skylark in her perfect bliss, and he shrank from the sight as though it gave him positive pain.

"How can I tell her?" he thought; "how can I ever tell her? And yet I ought—I ought."

Once or twice he feebly made the attempt, but Katherine put him down immediately in her decided way.

"Not a word now, papa—I won't have it. I don't want to hear any nasty, annoying secrets two days before my wedding, and have my peace of mind disturbed in this way. If I've got to hear this disagreeable thing, let me wait until the honeymoon is over—Gaston will help me bear it then—you tried to tell me Christmas Eve, and brought on a fit of apoplexy; and now, contrary to all medical commands, you want to begin over

again, and bring on another. But I'm mistress of the situation at present, and I won't listen. So set your mind at rest, and don't wear that gloomy countenance on the eve of your only daughter's marriage."

He was too feeble to resist. He held her to him a moment, and looked into the happy young face with a weary sigh.

"I suppose few fathers look very joyous on the eve of an only daughter's marriage, and I have greater reason than you dream of to look gloomy. But let it be as you say—let us postpone the evil hour as long as we can."

The last day came—the day before New Year's Eve. The bride elect had been busier even than usual all day. Mr. Dantree dined and spent the evening there alone. They were both very grave, very quiet—that long, peaceful evening, the last of her youth and her happiness, never faded from the girl's memory. The picture, as she saw it then, haunted her to her dying hour—the big, lamplit drawing-room—her father's quiet figure lying back in his easy chair before the fire—her lover at the piano playing soft melancholy airs, and she herself nestling in a dormeuse, listening to the music, and his whispered words—the "sweet nothings" of courtship. She followed him out into the grand portico entrance of the house to say good-by for the last time. The cold, white moon sailed up the azure, the stars were numberless, the trees cast long, black shadows in the ivory light. The night air sighed faintly in the woodland, something in the still, solemn beauty of the dying night filled the girl's heart with a sense almost of pain.

"The sun will shine to-morrow," Gaston whispered; "and 'blessed is the bride that the sun shines on!' Good-night, my darling, for the last time."

He held her in his arms a moment—for the last time!

The last time! And no foreboding—of all that was so near at hand came to her as she stood there.

The promise of the night did not hold good. Mr. Dantree's prediction as to the sunshine was not destined to be fulfilled. New Year's Eve dawned cloudy, cold, and overcast. A long, lamentable blast soughed up from the sea, the low-lying sky frowned darkly over the black, frost-bound earth.

"We're going to have a storm," Sir John said; "our guests must reach us through a tempest to-night."

The storm broke at noon—rain, sleet, and roaring wind. Katherine shivered as she listened to the wild whistling of the blast. She, usually the least nervous and superstitious of hu-

man beings, felt little cold chills creeping over her, as she harkened to its wintry howls.

"It sounds like the cry of a banshee," she said, with a shudder, to Edith Talbot. "Such a wild, black, sleety, wretched winter day! And last night there was not a cloud in the sky! Edith, do you believe in omens?"

"I believe this is a disagreeable day, as it is in the nature of December days to be, and that you are a nervous goose for the first time in your life. You don't suppose Mr. Dantree is sugar or salt to melt in the rain, or a feather for the wind to blow away. *Don't* be so restless and fidgety, Kathie, or you'll make me as nervous as yourself."

The short, dark, winter afternoon dragged on.

With the fall of the night the storm seemed to increase. The roar of the winds deepened; the dull thunder of the surf on the shore reached them; the trees waved in the high gale like human things in pain; and the ceaseless sleet lashed the glass.

"An awful night for a wedding," even the servants whispered. "No wonder poor Miss Katherine looks like a ghost."

She was pale beyond all the ordinary pallor of bridehood—strangely restless, strangely silent.

Darkness fell, the whole house was lit up; flowers bloomed everywhere as though it had been midsummer: warmth and luxury everywhere within contrasted with the travail of the dying year. Under the hands of her maid, Katherine sat passive to all changes. The supreme hour of her life had come, and in every wail of wind, every dash of the frozen rain, she seemed to hear the warning words of her old nurse: False as fair! False as fair!

Eight o'clock. The Rector of Castleford and his curate had arrived. Nine! The musicians had come, and the earliest of the nuptial guests; the roll of carriages could be heard through the tumult of the storm. Half-past nine! And "I wonder if Gaston has yet arrived?" Katherine said.

It was the first time she had spoken for over an hour. Her attendant bridesmaids, five besides Miss Talbot, were all there. The dressing-rooms were bright with fair girls, floating tulle and laces, and fragrant with flowers. Miss Talbot and the French maid were alone with the bride. The last touch had been given to the toilet. The robe of dead-white silk swept in its richness far behind, the tall, slim figure looked taller and slimmer than ever, the virginal orange blossoms crowned the long,

light-brown hair, the bridal veil floated like a mist over all. The last jewel was placed, the last ribbon tied, the last fall of lace arranged. She stood before the mirror fair, pale, pensive —a bride ready for the altar.

A quarter of ten! The Swiss clock, telling of the quarters, startled them. How the moments flew—how fast the guests were arriving through the storm. The roll of carriages was almost incessant now, and lifting her dreamy eyes Katherine repeated her inquiry: "I wonder if Gaston has come?"

"What a question!" cried Miss Talbot. "A bridegroom late, and that bridegroom Mr. Dantree of all men. Of course, he has come, and is waiting in a fever of impatience downstairs. Ninon, run and see."

The French girl went, and came flying back breathlessly.

"Mademoiselle, how strange. Monsieur Dantree has *not* arrived. Monseigneur, the abbé, is ready and waiting—all the guests are assembled, but *mon Dieu!* the bridegroom is late!"

Miss Talbot looked at her friend. Neither spoke nor moved. The flock of bridesmaids, a "rose-bud garden of girls," came floating in with their misty drapery, their soft voices and subdued laughter. It was ten o'clock, and the wedding hour.

There was a tap at the door. Ninon opened it, and old Sir John, white as ashes and trembling on his staff, entered and approached his daughter.

"Katherine, Dantree has not come."

"I know it, father. Something has happened."

Her voice was quite steady, but a gray, ashen terror blanched her face.

"Had you not better send to Morecambe?" Edith Talbot interposed. "He was quite well when I left this morning. Has George arrived?"

"Your brother is here, Miss Talbot."

"And what does he say?"

"Nothing to the point. Before dark Dantree left him to go to his room and dress. Your brother when starting for here sent him word, and found his room deserted. Taking it for granted he wished to be alone, and had left for Scarswood before him, your brother came over at once. He was astonished when he arrived at not finding him here."

And then dead silence fell. What did it mean?

Below the guests had gathered in groups, whispering ominously; in the "bridal bower" bride and bridesmaids looked at

each other's pale faces and never spoke. One by one the moments told off. A quarter past ten, and still no bridegroom!

Then all at once wheels dashed up to the door—in the entrance hall there was the sudden bustle of an arrival. Katherine's heart gave one great bound; and Edith Talbot, unable to endure the suspense, unable to look at her friend's tortured face, turned and ran out of the room.

"Wait!" she said. "I will be back in a moment."

She flew down the stairs. Some one had arrived—a gentleman—but not Gaston Dantree. The new-comer, pale, breathless, eager, was only Peter Dangerfield.

But he might bring news—he looked as though he did. She was by his side in a moment, her hand on his arm.

"What is it?" she said. "Has anything happened to Mr. Dantree?"

"Yes, Dangerfield," exclaimed Captain De Vere, coming forward. "As second-best man I have a right to know. Shorten the agony, if possible, and out with it. What's up? The hour is past and the bride is waiting, where the DEVIL is the bridegroom?"

---

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE TELLING OF THE SECRET.

WHERE was the bridegroom?

Gaston Dantree bade good-by to Katherine Dangerfield, and rode down that noble avenue of elms leading to the ponderous gates. His horse's footsteps rang clear and sharp through the still, frosty air, the silvery mist of moonlight bathed all things in its pale, mystic glow.

He paused an instant to look back, ere he rode away. What a fair domain it was—what a stately sweep of park, and glade, and woodland—fairer than ever in the pearly light of the Christmas moon. How noble the old house looked, with its turrets, its peaked gables, its massive stack of chimneys. And to-morrow all this would be—his—he an outcast of the New York streets.

He laughed softly, exultantly to himself, as he turned and rode swiftly away.

"It's better to be born lucky than rich—it's better to be born handsome than lucky. A clear complexion and a set of regular features, a tenor voice, and insinuating manners have done more for me than they do for most men. They have made my fortune. Half the men and women in the world are fools at best, and don't know how to use the gifts with which nature endows them. I was born in the gutter, brought up in the streets, adopted out of charity, turned out for my shortcomings, to starve, or steal, to go to State prison, or—become the literary hack of a sporting paper, ill-paid, and ill-used. And *now*—to-morrow is my wedding day, and a baronet's daughter and the heiress of eight thousand a year to be my bride. Gaston Dantree, I congratulate you again, and still again, you're one of the very cleverest fellows I ever knew in the whole course of my life."

And then, as Mr. Dantree rode over the moonlit high-road, he astonished belated wayfarers by uplifting his voice in melody, so sweet and clear, that even the sleeping nightingales, had there been any in December, might have awakened to listen and envy. The wheels of the world were greased on their axles for him. A bride and a fortune, and a life of perpetual pleasure lay beyond to-morrow's sunrise. There was only one thorn in all his bed of roses—Marie.

"If she should come, after all! and Satan himself I believe can never tell what a woman may do. You may be as certain as that you live she will take one course, and ten to one she takes the direct opposite. For Marie De Lansac to pursue any man, though he sat on the throne of the Cæsars, is the most unlikely thing on earth, and for that very reason she may turn up now. If she should appear to-morrow, and forbid the banns! Such things happen sometimes. Or, if she should turn up a year hence, and proclaim my secret and her wrongs! And bigamy's a devilish ugly word!"

The shadow of the avenger pursued Mr. Dantree into dreamland. His visions this ante-nuptial night were all dark and ominous. He fell asleep, to see the face of the woman he feared, dark and menacing; he awoke, and fell asleep again, to see it pallid and despairing, wild with woman's utmost woe. He started out of bed at last, at some abnormal hour in the dismal dawn, with a curse upon his lips. Sleeping or waking, the face of Marie De Lansac haunted him like an

avenging ghost. The storm had come with the new day—rain and sleet beat the glass, the wind howled dismally around the house and up and down the draughty passages. Mr. Dantree scowled at the distant prospect—atmospheric influences did not affect him much as a rule, but they affected him to-day I suppose the least sensitive of human beings likes bright sunshine, balmy breezes, and cloudless skies for his wedding day. Mr. Dantree cursed the weather—cursed the pursuing memory that drove him from his bed—cursed his own folly in letting superstitious fears trouble him, and having finished his litany, produced a smoke-colored bottle of French brandy, a case of manillas, and flung himself into an easy chair before the still smouldering fire. He primed himself with *eau de vie* until the breakfast bell rang, and then descended to meet his host and his sister, and get the vapors of the night dispelled in their society.

Miss Talbot departed for Scarswood almost immediately after breakfast. Mr. Dantree escorted her to the carriage, and moodily watched her drive away.

"I suppose I am to give your love to Katherine?" the young lady said, gayly; "and I suppose we won't see you until the hour. Try and wear a less dolorous face, signor, when you *do* present yourself. It's a serious occasion, beyond doubt, but not even matrimony can warrant so gloomy a countenance as that."

How the long interminable hours of that day wore on, Gaston Dantree never afterward knew. Something was going to happen—he simply felt that—what, he did not know. Marie might come, or she might not; but whether or no, something would happen. The dark sleety hours dragged slowly along—he smoked furiously—he drank more brandy than was at all prudent or usual for bridegrooms—he went in and out in a restless fever, that would not let him sit down. He paced up and down the leafless aisles, the sleet driving sharply in his face, the keen wind piercing him, for he was of a chilly nature. Were presentiments true? None had ever troubled him before. Was it a guilty conscience? It was the first time he ever realized he had a conscience; or was it a worse demon than either—the gloomy fiend of—indigestion?

"A sluggish liver has made men blow their brains out before now, and a dyspeptic stomach has seen ghosts. Presentiments are sentimental humbugs—it's the heavy dinners at Scarswood, and the French cookery at Morecambe, combined

with a leaden sky, and a miserable December day. If the infernally long day were ended, and this hour come, I should feel all right, I know."

His host watched him curiously from the window, wandering about in the storm like an unquiet spirit. Bridegrooms may be restless as a rule on the happy day, but not such restlessness as this.

"There's something on that fellow's mind," the young Sussex squire thought. "He has the look to-day of a man who is *afraid*, and I don't think he's a coward as a rule. I've thought from the first this marriage would be a deucedly bad job, and it's no end of a pity. She's such a trump of a girl—little Kathie—no nonsense about her, you know; rides to hounds like a born Nimrod-ess, dances like a fairy, plucky, and thoroughbred from top to toe. And she's going to throw herself away on this duffer, for no reason under heaven but that he's got a good-looking face. Hang it all! Why did I ever fetch him down to Morecambe, or why need Katherine Dangerfield be such a little fool? Who's to tell us the fellow hasn't a wife already out in New Orleans?"

Sometime after noon the bridegroom elect flung himself on his bed and fell heavily asleep. He did not dream this time; he slept—for hours—the beneficial effect of French brandy, no doubt. The short dark day had faded entirely out—the candles were lit, and Squire Talbot's man stood over him adjuring him to rise.

"Beg parding, sir, for disturbing you, but master's horders, sir, and it's 'alf after six, Mr. Dantree, sir, and time, master says, to get up and dress. And master's horders, sir, is, that I'm to hassist you."

Mr. Dantree leaped from the bed. Half-past six, and time to dress. No more endless hours, to think and fidget,—that was a comfort, at least.

"How's the weather, now, Lewis?" he asked. "Storm held up any? No—I see it has not—rather worse, if anything. Where's the squire?"

"In his hapartment, sir—dressing, sir. Permit *me* to do that, Mr. Dantree, sir—if you please. Dinner's to be arf an hour later than husual, sir, on this occasion—you'll 'ave just time to dress and no more."

Lewis was an adept in his business. At half-past seven Mr. Dantree descended to dinner in full evening suit—white waist

coat, diamond studs, dress coat, shiny boots—robed for the sacrifice!

He and the squire dined *tête-à-tête*. Neither ate much—both were nervous and silent.

"What the deuce ever made me bring the fellow down?" the squire kept thinking, moodily, casting gloomy glances athwart the tall epergne of flowers between them. And "Will anything happen after all?" the bridegroom kept saying over and over; "will the heiress of Scarswood be my wife to-morrow morning, or will something prevent it at the eleventh hour, and expose me. It would be just my usual infernal luck."

He went back to his room after dinner. They had not lingered, and it was still only eight o'clock. A quarter before ten would be early enough to arrive at Scarswood, and run the gauntlet of threescore curious eyes. "I wish it were over," he exclaimed, aloud, almost savagely. "I wouldn't undergo such an ordeal again for all the heiresses in Great Britain."

"It *is* a nervous business," a voice in the doorway responded; "but take courage. There's many a slip, you know, and though it wants but two hours to the time, you may escape the matrimonial noose after all."

Gaston Dantree swung round with an oath. There, in the doorway, stood Peter Dangerfield.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Dantree," the lawyer said, glibly, coming in, and shutting the door. "You don't look best pleased to see me, but that is not to be wondered at."

"Where the devil did you spring from?" Mr. Dantree demanded, angrily.

"I sprang from nowhere—I've given up gymnastics. I drove over from Castleford, in the rain, on important business—important business to *you*. A quarter past eight," he drew out his watch, "and I see you are all dressed for the ceremony. That gives us an hour and three quarters—plenty of time for what I want you to do."

"What—you—want—me—to—do! Mr. Dangerfield, I confess I am at a loss to—"

"To understand me—exactly—quite natural that you should and all that. I'll explain. Circumstances have come to light concerning Sir John Dangerfield and—well—and the young lady you are going to marry. As a friend of yours, Mr. Dantree, I consider it would be a shameful deception to let the marriage go on while you are in ignorance of those circumstances. Sir, you have been grossly deceived—we have all been,

and—but it is impossible for me to explain. Thereby hangs a tale, and all that—which I don't wish to tell. The person who told me is waiting at Castleford to tell you. I drove here at once—my trap is waiting outside now. I made my way to your room unannounced. I know the house, and I want you to put on your hat and great-coat, and come with me to Castleford at once."

Gaston Dantree stood very pale, listening to this lengthy and rapid harangue. His presentiments were all true, then—something was going to occur. At the last hour the glittering prize for which he had fought and won was to be snatched from him. His lips were set hard, and there was a dull red glow not good to see in his black eyes. But he kept his temper—under all circumstances it was the rule of his life to keep that.

"Mr. Dangerfield," he said, "will you be so good as to open the mysteries a little? Your speech sounds melodramatic—and I don't care for melo-drama off the boards. Why am I to go to Castleford? What are the circumstances? Whom am I to meet?—and how have we all been deceived? Do you wish to insinuate anything against Miss Dangerfield?"

"Not a word—not a syllable. She is blameless and I don't wish to stop your marriage—Heaven forbid! No one will wish you joy, two hours hence, when the ceremony is over, more sincerely than I."

Gaston Dantree looked at him, staggered a little. The marriage was not to be stopped, then. He drew a long tense breath of relief.

"This is all very strange. I *wish* you would explain. I'll go with you to Castleford—it will kill the intervening time as well as anything else—but, I'd rather not go in the dark."

"You must. Take my word for it, Dantree, it is necessary. It is impossible for me to tell you—I am bound by oath. Come with me—come! I swear you shall be at Scarswood by ten o'clock."

For a moment Dantree stood irresolute. Then curiosity overcame every other feeling. He seized his hat and coat with a slight laugh.

"Be it so, then. Lead on, as they say in novels, I follow—and my good fellow, drive like the very deuce."

He ran lightly downstairs—Peter Dangerfield followed. There was a flush on the lawyer's sallow parchment cheeks, a fire in his dim, near-sighted eyes, all unusual there. They met

no one. The squire was still in his "hapartment," the servants were busy. The gig lamps of Mr. Dangerfield's trap loomed like two fiery eyes in the stormy blackness. Dantree leaped in, Dangerfield followed, snatched up the reins, and sped away like the wind.

It was a dead, silent drive. It was all Peter Dangerfield could do to hold the reins and make his way through the double darkness of night and storm. Gaston Dantree sat with folded arms waiting. What was he to hear?—where was he going?—whom was he to see? A strange adventure this, surely, on a man's wedding night.

The lights of Castleford gleamed through the sleet, the dull cannonading of the sea on the coast came to them above the shrieks of the wind. In five minutes they had driven up before an inn:—the two men sprang out, a hostler took charge of the conveyance, and Peter Dangerfield, with a brief "This way, Dantree," sprang swiftly up the stairs, and rapped at a door on the first landing.

It was opened instantly, and Gaston Dantree saw—Mrs. Vavasor.

She was magnificently dressed to-night. A rich robe of purple silk, *en traine*, swept behind her—diamonds flashed on neck and fingers—and white perfumy roses nestled in the glossy masses of satin black hair. The rouge bloomed its brightest, the enamel glittered with alabaster dazzle, the almond eyes were longer, brighter, blacker than ever, and that peculiar smile on her squirrel-shaped mouth was never so radiant before.

"You did not expect to see me, Mr. Dantree, did you? You didn't know I have been in Castleford a whole week. And I've come for the wedding all the way from Paris. I crossed the channel at the risk of expiring in the agonies of sea sickness, I braved your beastly British climate, I have buried myself alive a whole week here, without a soul to speak to—all—to be present at Katherine Dangerfield's wedding, if—that wedding ever takes place."

Mr. Dantree looked at his watch, outwardly, at least, perfectly cool.

"It will be an accomplished fact in one hour, madame. And there is a good old adage about its being well to wait until you're asked—wouldn't it have been better if you had remembered it? Your affection for Miss Dangerfield does credit to your head and heart, but I fear it is unreciprocated. She loves you as Old Nick loves holy water."

"Nevertheless, I shall go to her wedding; I told her so once, and I mean to keep my word, if—as I said before—that wedding ever takes place."

"Will you be kind enough to explain?"

He was quite white, but braced to meet the worst. He looked her steadily between the eyes. She stood and returned that gaze smiling, silent, and with a devil in either glittering eye. For Peter Dangerfield, he stood aloof and listened.

"What a fortunate fellow you are, Gaston Dantree," Mrs. Vavasor said, after that short pause. "You are the very handsomest man, I think, I ever saw; you are the best singer off the operatic stage I ever heard: your manners are perfect in their insolent ease; you are seven-and-twenty—a charming age—and you possess what so seldom goes with beauty, unhappily—brains. The world is your oyster, and you open it cleverly; you are a penniless Yankee adventurer, and a baronet's daughter, and the heiress of eight thousand a year is waiting at Scarswood to marry you to-night. Under what fortunate combination of the planets were you born, I wonder; you don't love this young lady you are going to marry; but love is an exploded idea—the stock in trade of poets and novelists. People with eight thousand a year can dispense with love; but where the bride and groom are *both* penniless—oh, well! that's another matter."

"Mrs. Vavasor, it is after nine o'clock. Did you send for me to listen to a homily? If so, having heard it, allow me to take my departure."

"Don't be in a hurry, Mr. Dantree—there's no occasion Ten o'clock will come, but I don't believe we'll have a wedding to-night after all."

"You have said that three times!"—Gaston Dantree's eyes were growing stern, and his mouth was set in one thin hard line—the same thing repeated too often grows a bore. Be kind enough, if you mean anything, to tell me *what* you mean."

"I will! I mean this, my handsome Louisianian—that your bride-elect is no more a baronet's daughter—no more Sir John Dangerfield's heiress—than I am!"

## CHAPTER XIII.

### MRS. VAVASOR'S STORY.

IT was out, and Gaston Dantree stood for a moment stunned, looking at the evil, smiling face of the speaker, and absolutely unable to reply. Then—

"I don't believe it," he said slowly.

Mrs. Vavasor laughed aloud:

"You mean you don't *want* to believe it. It's not pleasant for a successful adventurer. Oh, don't be offended; it's only the name commonplace people give other people cleverer than themselves. It's not pleasant, I say, when the golden chalice of fortune is at our lips to see a ruthless hand spill that wine of life at our feet. It isn't pleasant for a handsome, dark-eyed Adonis, with the face of a god and the purse of a—pauper, to find the reputed daughter and heiress of a wealthy baronet, whom he is going to marry, as great a pauper as himself—greater, indeed, for she lacks the good looks that may yet make your fortune, Mr. Dantree. It isn't pleasant, but it is perfectly true. Sir John Dangerfield has imposed upon you—upon his rightful heir here, Mr. Dangerfield, upon society—passing off a girl of whose parentage he is in most absolute ignorance, as his daughter. Don't fly into a passion, Mr. Dantree, as I see you are half inclined to do—at least not with me. I'm not afraid of you, and I'm not to blame. If you don't believe me—but I see you do—come with me to Scarswood—Mr. Dangerfield and I are bound for the wedding—and be convinced from Sir John's own lips. My shawl, if you please, Mr. Dangerfield—Sir Peter that is to be."

He took the rich Parisian wrap and folded it gallantly around her slim shoulders.

Gaston Dantree still stood utterly confounded—a blank feeling of rage and fury, and despair choking the passionate words he would have said. She looked at him, and laughed again:

"*Mon Dieu!* he is like an incarnate thunder-cloud—black and ferocious as a Levantine pirate, or an Alpine brigand. Cheer up, *mon ami*, we won't take your bride from you—only her fortune; and what are a few thousands a year, more or less, to such a devoted lover as you? And she would go with you to beggary. It makes a hardened woman of the world, like

myself, absolutely young again to see such gushing and beautiful devotion. I rather thought romance had gone out of fashion in this year of grace, and that it was only at Covent Garden we heard of 'two souls with but a single thought—two hearts that beat as one.' But I have found out my mistake, and think better of the world since I have known you. My bonnet, Mr. Dangerfield—thanks. Now then, messieurs—forward! march! I am entirely at your service."

She took Peter Dangerfield's arm, looking backward over her shoulder at the black, marble figure of the bridegroom, like the smiling vixen she was.

"Come, Gaston, *mon brave*," she said; "though you lose an heiress, you need not lose a bride. We will be but a few minutes late after all. Come—away!"

She ran lightly down the stairs, humming, with a face of malicious delight, "Haste to the Wedding."

The hour for which she had hungered and thirsted for years and years had come—the hour of her vengeance. "Revenge is sweet—particularly to a woman," singeth my Lord Byron, and he had hit truth as well as poetry when he said it. A man sometimes spares his enemy—a woman will forgive a man seventy times seven, but one woman will spare another—never!

Gaston Dantree followed. His lips were set in an expression no one who beheld him this night had ever seen before; his dark eyes were lurid with rage, disappointment, and fury, his dusky face savage and set. All his presentiments were fulfilled—more than fulfilled. At the worst he had not dreamed of anything half so bad as this. He *believed* what he had heard—there was that in Mrs. Vavasor's face and voice, with all their malice, that showed she spoke the truth. For the second time he had been foiled—in the very hour of his triumph. A demoniacal rage filled him—against this woman, against the baronet, against Katherine, against himself.

"What a dolt—what an ass I have been!" he muttered inaudibly, grinding his teeth; "what a laughing-stock I shall be! But, by Heaven! if I am to lose a fortune, Katherine Dangerfeld shall lose a husband. It's one thing to risk Newgate for an heiress, but I'll see all the portionless, adopted daughters this side of the infernal regions at the bottom of the bottomless pit, before I'll risk it for one of them!"

And then Mr. Dantree folded his arms in sullen silence, and let things take their course. He knew the worst—he had put his fate to the test, and lost it all. Nothing remained but to see

the play played out, to pack his trunk, and at once seek fresh fields and pastures new.

The night was black as Erebus; the cold, cutting sleet still beat, the wind still blew. The street lamps flared and flickered in the soughs of wind—the shops of the town were shut—lights twinkled pleasantly behind closed blinds. Mrs. Vavasor sat behind him muffled in her wraps—a demoniacal desire to pitch her headlong out of the trap was strong upon Mr. Dantree.

"Little devil!" he thought, looking at her savagely under cover of the darkness. "She knew it all along and waited for this melo-dramatic climax. It's your turn now, Mrs. Vavasor; when the wheel revolves and mine comes, I'll remember this dark night's work!"

Not one word was spoken until the lights of Scarswood came in sight. Gaston Dantree's heart was full of passionate bitterness, as the huge gate lamps hove in view. And to-morrow all this might have been his.

"Curse the luck!" he thought. "I might have known that blasted old harridan, Fortune, could have nothing so good in store for a step-son like me."

They whirled up under the frowning stone arch—up under the black, rocking trees. The whole long front of the old mansion was brilliant with illumination. The great portico entrance stood wide; they saw Squire Talbot and Captain De Vere come out with anxious faces; they saw Miss Talbot in her white festal robes float down the black, oaken stairway.

"All waiting for the bridegroom!" Mrs. Vavasor said, with her habitual short laugh. "Do you go forward, Mr. Dangerfield, and relieve their anxiety. We follow."

Peter Dangerfield sprang up the steps—never in all his life before half so nimbly. And Edith Talbot flitted forward to him, smiling, but with an anxious quiver in her voice.

"Oh, come ye in peace, or come ye in war, or to dance at our bridal, young Lord Lochinvar? Mr. Dangerfield, *where* is Mr. Dantree?"

"Mr. Dantree is here."

He spoke very quietly, but what hidden delight gleamed in his small pale eyes! If they only knew! He stepped on one side, and Gaston Dantree and Mrs. Vavasor stood revealed.

One glance at the bridegroom's face, and blank silence fell. What had happened? Surely never bridegroom, from Adam down, wore so black and gloomy a scowl on his wedding night!

Edith Talbot recoiled with clasped hands, her brother and the captain of the Plungers stood looking at him aghast.

"By Jove, Dantree," the gallant captain managed to stammer at last. "You look awfully cut up, you know. What the deuce is the row? Don't you know you're behind time, man, and—I say, old boy! I hope nothing serious is the matter, you know?"

"Something serious *is* the matter," Peter Dangerfield made answer gravely, for the gentleman addressed only scowled a little more blackly; "and we wish to see Sir John immediately. Miss Talbot, we are going to the library—will you tell my uncle to join us there? And if you can keep Katherine out of the way for the next half hour, perhaps it will be as well."

He led the way to the library, his two companions after him—Mr. Dantree stalking along like a specter.

The vast and spacious library was brilliantly lit by a cluster of waxlights and the flicker of a dying fire. Shadows crouched darkly in the corners, and the bloody hand shone vividly in the escutcheon over the mantel. The long silken curtains were undrawn; outside by a faint lighting in the northern sky, the tossing, wind-blown trees, the slanting sweep of the rain could be seen. Outside there was the uproar of the storm—inside dead stillness reigned.

Peter Dangerfield took a seat deep in the shadow of the vast Maltese window, and looked around the lofty and noble room as he had never looked before.

The dark walls lined with books from ceiling to floor, the busts, the bronzes, the pictures, and the heavy-carved old furniture. One day all this would be his—one day—one day!

There was a luxurious fauteuil drawn up before the fire; into this Mrs. Vavasor sank, throwing back her wet wrap. Mr. Dantree stood near, his elbow on the mantel, his dark angry eyes fixed on the fire, his mouth set under his black mustache, stern and grim. There was neither pity nor mercy in his heart for the girl who loved him. He had not been spared—why should he spare? He had never loved her—he hated her in this hour.

So he waited—how long he never knew—full of silent, sullen fury, all the more dangerous from this outward quiet. And then the door opened, and Sir John Dangerfield came in.

If he had not known before he entered, he knew, the moment his eyes rested upon them, all that had happened.

His secret was told—this woman had played him false. Peter

Dangerfield knew he was heir-at-law—Gaston Dantree knew Katherine was not his daughter. The murder was out.

He drew a long breath—absolutely a breath of intense relief. He had dreaded this hour unutterably—he had stooped to deception—to falsehood and bribery, for the first time in all his brave life, to avert it; and now, that it had come, he thanked Heaven. He could breathe freely and face his fellow men again—he could hold his head erect among his peers once more. His great love had made him a coward—his life had been unspeakably miserable under the burden of the secret he dared not tell. But another had told it in spite of him—he was free! He flung back his head proudly, and walked into their midst with his firm, soldierly step and stately bearing, and stood directly opposite Gaston Dantree. The Southerner lifted his gloomy eyes, and the gaze of the two men met—steady, stern, unflinchingly.

"You are late, Mr. Dantree," the baronet said, coldly and briefly. "You pay your bride a poor compliment by keeping her waiting on her bridal eve."

"I greatly doubt, Sir John, whether there will be either bride or bridal to-night. Certainly, before Miss Dangerfield—if there be any such person—becomes Mrs. Dantree, you will clear up a little statement of Mrs. Vavasor's. She tells us the young lady you have palmed upon us as your daughter and heiress, is —*who* is she, Sir John Dangerfield?"

The baronet turned his eyes for the first time upon the little figure in the arm-chair.

"You have broken faith with me, Harriet Harman. You took my money, and meant to betray me."

"I took your money and meant to betray you? Yes! I would not have forfeited my revenge for three times the money."

"I might have known it. Then you have told these two men—all?"

"I have told them nothing as yet, save the bare fact that Katherine is not your daughter. Mr. Dantree did me the honor to disbelieve me—it isn't for his interest, you see, as it is for your nephew's, to believe it; so I brought them here to relate the story in your presence. They can't very well refuse to credit it then. And, as I still trust, the wedding will go on," with her most satirical smile; "and as I don't wish to keep poor little Kathie waiting any longer than is absolutely necessary, I will begin at once. If my memory fails me in any

minor particular, Sir John, or if any of my statements are incorrect, you will be good enough to set me right. Messieurs Dantree and Dangerfield, listen!"

She folded her hands, looked into the ruddy coals, and began.

"It's so long ago—so long—so long—it makes one's hair gray only to look back. It's fifteen years, my hearers, since the express train from Rouen to Paris bore among its passengers one day a woman and a child—a little girl of two. They were very poor—very shabby, and traveled third class. By the same train traveled likewise, to Paris, an English officer, his lady, and little daughter, also aged two years or thereabouts. The English officer was under marching orders for India, and was going to sail with his interesting family in a very few days.

"But man proposes—French railway trains sometimes dispose, and very unpleasantly. A cattle train came along—there was a mistake somewhere, and worse,—there was a collision. Crash! crash!—away we went! Something hit the poor little woman, traveling third class, on the head, and she knew no more.

"She opened her eyes next in a hospital, very weak, one great pain from head to foot, but quite conscious and likely to live. Her first question was for the child—dead or alive!

"'Alive,' the gentle-faced sister of charity said, 'and well, and uninjured; and, if I were willing to dispose of it in a fair way, to make its fortune for life.'

"'How?' I asked.

"In this way: An English officer and his lady, traveling in the same unfortunate express train, had had their child killed—killed instantly by that terrible collision. The officer and his lady had escaped unhurt—they were wild with grief, but remembered their fellow-sufferers through it all. The baby was buried in *Père la Chaise*, poor angel! and monsieur le officer and his lady came daily to the hospital to see their fellow-sufferers. Here they had seen me, here they had been shown my child—scantily clad, thin, pale, half-fed—an object of compassion to gods and men. And its little, wan, pathetic, suffering, patient face went straight to that desolate spot in their hearts. I was very poor—what could I do with it? They would adopt it, bring it up as their own, give it their name, their love, and make an elegant English young lady of a little nameless, ragged waif and stray.

"I listened to all this—too weak to say much, and when next the English officer and his lady visited the hospital, heard

them repeat the same arguments. My answer was ready: If they would give me two hundred pounds, cash down—I was very moderate—they might take the infant for good, to India or the North Pole, and do with her as they would.

"My ready acquiescence, my business-like way of putting things, rather took them aback—rather shocked the paternal instinct of my Englishman. He looked at me with distrustful eyes, and asked if I were really the child's mother. It would have been more politic, I dare say, to have said yes, but I couldn't say it. I hated that child—I had hated its mother—and some of that hatred looked out of my eyes at him, and made him recoil.

"'She's not my child,' I said; 'I tell you the truth. She's not mine, but she belongs to me. Never mind how—never mind anything about her, except that you may take her if you like—on my terms. If you don't like them, no harm done—some one else will. Two hundred pounds down, good English gold, and take her away out of my sight. I'll never trouble you any more about her, and no one else ever will. Now do as you like.' And then I shut my lips and my eyes, and waited.

"The answer was what I expected—the mother had taken a fancy to the little one, and my Englishman only lived to gratify every fancy of his wife. They would pay the two hundred down, and would take the child. In India she and I were never likely to meet again. What was my name?

"'Harriet Harman.'

"That was the name I gave. Whether or no it were mine, is nobody's business here.

"'And the child's name—what was that?'

"'Harriet Harman, too. But if they meant to adopt her, they had better re-christen her—after the little cherub gone up aloft, for instance.'

"We closed the bargain. I got the two hundred pounds and signed the receipt; I have it yet. I laughed as I sold the child, and got my price. It was the first installment of my vengeance—this is the second. What would her mother say, I thought, if she could only have been informed of this transaction.

"They took the child away. I wanted her to shake hands with me, but she wouldn't. If you'll believe me, at two years old she wouldn't. And I hadn't treated her badly. She clung to Mrs. Dangerfield's skirts, and wouldn't so much as look at me.

"'Good-by, then, *ma petite*,' I said: 'I don't mind the shake hands. Go to India and be happy. If we ever meet again, perhaps you'll think better of it, and shake hands again.'

"My English officer and his lady came again, and again, and again to me, to induce me to speak and tell little Katherine's antecedents—(they named her Katherine at once, after the little angel crushed to jelly). They offered me another hundred, and they could illy spare it, but all the gold in the Bank of England would not have made me open my lips until my own time came. I wouldn't tell, and I haven't told, and I don't mean to tell until I choose.

"Katherine Dangerfield's father and friends live, but who they are no power on earth shall ever wring from me.

"They took her to India, and for fifteen years I lost sight of the little one. But it was not out of sight out of mind—I never quite lost her. My life was a wandering one—a hard one often—but on the whole not an unpleasant one. I made money and spent money—I pitched my tent in every Continental city, and at last, one day in Paris, I picked up an English paper, and read there how Sir Everard Dangerfield, of Scarswood, sixth baronet of the name, was dead, and how Sir John Dangerfield, late of her Majesty's Honorable East India Company's service, had succeeded to the title and estates. Sir John and his only child, Miss Katherine Dangerfield, were expected in England by the first steamer.

"Here was news! Here was a lift in the world for *la petite*. I made inquiries about this Scarswood park; I found out it had a rent-roll of eight thousand a year, strictly entailed to the nearest of kin, whether male or female; I found out Sir John had a nephew in the place, who, lacking heirs on Sir John's part, was heir-at-law; I found out that the prevailing belief was that the young lady coming from India was really Sir John's daughter; I found out that the death of the child in the French railway accident, fifteen years before, was a dead secret. Mrs. Dangerfield had died very soon after her arrival in India, and Sir John alone was the possessor of the secret, excepting always that he had not told missy herself.

"I read the English papers after that—your English papers that chronicle everything your great men and your little men do. I read how Sir John and Miss Dangerfield had arrived, how they had gone down to Scarswood, how bells had rung, and bonfires blazed, and tenantry cheered, and old friends trooped to welcome them. They had liked Sir Everard, but Sir Everard was

gone, and it was of course, 'The king is dead—*live* the king.'

"Sir John had taken possession, and I set the detective police at work to find out what I wanted to know. I found it out, neither missy herself nor any living being dreamed she was other than the baronet's daughter.

"My time had come—my fortune was made; I wrote my baronet a letter; I told him I was coming; I bade him call me Mrs. Vavasor. It's a pretty name, an aristocratic name, and I have retained it ever since. And as soon as ever I could raise the money, for it was one of my impoverished seasons, I took the train and started.

"That was last September. Miss Dangerfield had just met Mr. Dantree, only three months ago; but what would you? We live in a rapid age, a breathless age of steam and electric telegraphs, and love no longer flies with old-fashioned wings, but speeds along by lightning express. Miss Dangerfield was just seventeen—a feverish and impressionable age—of a susceptible and romantic turn of mind, superinduced by a surfeit of poetry and novels, and she meets a young man, well-dressed, well-mannered, and handsomer than anything out of a frame. He's only Gaston Dantree, a good singer, and a penny-a-liner; but in her rose-colored imagination he is set up as a demi-god, and she falls down and worships him. It's the way of her sex, and he takes all the worship as his right and due—the way of *his* sex—and keeps a bright lookout for the eight thousand a year.

"Well—I come. I find missy grown up tall, slim, spirited, proud, and not pretty. I find her like her mother, her mother whose memory I hate to-night, as I hated herself twenty years ago—I find her, like her mother, resolute, passionate, self-willed, and utterly spoiled. She has no thought that she is other than she seems. She is in love, and determined to be married. Best of all, the man she loves is penniless, not the least in the world in love with her, only bent heart and soul on her fortune. Here is a glorious chance for me!

"Miss Dangerfield, from the uplifted heights whereon petted heiresses dwell, does not deign to tolerate *me*. From the first she abhors me, and she is a good hater. She does not remember me, of course; she doesn't know what good reason she has to be my enemy, but she hates me with an honest, open, hearty hatred that is absolutely refreshing. She snubs me upon every occasion—she implores her father to give me money if I want it, and turn me out of doors. If I didn't owe her mother that

old grudge I should be forced to owe her one on her own account.

"And Sir John does turn me out. Poor old soldier—it's a little hard on him. He want's to do right—deception and secrecy are foreign to his nature—but how can he? He idolizes this girl; it will half kill her he knows to hear the truth; it will part her from her lover, break her heart, and make her hate *him*—unjustly, no doubt; but when was ever a woman just? And he clings to his secret with desperate tenacity, and pays me ten thousand pounds to keep it inviolate, and bids me go and return no more.

"I take the money—whoever refuses money?—and I go, *but* to return. I go to Paris, ever-gracious, ever-fascinating Paris; I enjoy myself and I wait. And in England meantime the lovers bill and coo, and the sword that hangs over their head, upheld by a single hair, they don't see.

"One week before the wedding day, I come quietly and unostentatiously to Castleford. I go to Peter Dangerfield in his lodgings; poor Mr. Peter, who doesn't dream he is wronged. I find him alone, gloomy and solitary this Christmas Eve, while over at Scarswood waxlights burn, and yulefires blaze, and Mr. Dantree kisses his bride-elect under the mistletoe, and music and merriment reign. I find him alone and very gloomy; he is thinking how this cruel Katherine jilted him and called him a rickety dwarf—how a dreary life of legal labor lies before him, and Scarswood will go to Gaston Dantree and his children. He is thinking all this over his bachelor glass of grog, when I appear before him like the fairy god-mother I am, and with one wave of my wand, lo! all things change. The haughty heiress falls from her pedestal, and he becomes the heir! Scarswood will be his and his alone when Sir John dies. Pearls and diamonds drop from my lips, and he promises in a burst of generosity that the ten thousand pounds reward I ask shall gladly be mine.

"And the wedding night arrives, and we come out of the seclusion in which we have chosen to hide into the light of day. He goes for the bridegroom—he brings him to me through night, and storm, and darkness, and I tell him the truth. I tell him Katherine Dangerfield (so called) is no more your daughter, no more your heiress than I am: I tell him he has been grossly deceived from first to last. He does not believe me—poor young man; it is not a pleasant thing to believe. Then I bring him here again through night, and storm, and darkness

braving all things for the noble sake of truth, and I repeat before your face what I said behind your back, Sir John, and dare you to deny it. I repeat that the girl who calls you father is no more your daughter or heiress than—"

She stopped short and rose up. Among the shadows at the lower end of the room a darker shadow flickered.

A door had softly opened, a curtain had hidden the unseen listener until now.

A white hand pushed back the drapery—a white face emerged into the light.

It was the bride herself, in her shining robe, and orange wreath, and silvery vail, standing there and hearing every word.

---

## CHAPTER XIV.

### DAY OF WRATH! DAY OF GRIEF!

THERE was dead silence. All eyes fell upon her at once; all rose as she came gliding forward. Passionate, impetuous, impulsive, what would she say—what would she do?

In that dead silence she comes floating forward, a shining bridal vision—whiter than the robe she wore—white, cold, calm. In all her life this girl had never restrained one single emotion—now in the supreme hour of her life her pale face was as emotionless as though carved in stone.

She came straight up to Sir John and looked him full in the face with her large, solemn eyes.

"I have been there since you came in"—she pointed to the curtained recess, and her voice had neither falter nor tremor. "And I have heard every word. Is it all true?"

He turned away from her and covered his face with his hands with a sort of dry sobbing sound hard to hear.

"Is it all true?" she repeated, slowly, painfully. "I want to know the worst."

"Then Heaven help me! Yes, Katherine, it is all true—all—all!"

"And I am not your daughter?"

"You are not! Oh, my darling, forgive me. If I had

loved you less I might have had courage to tell you the truth."

Her face had never changed from its stony calm, her dark, dilated eyes never left his.

"And this is the secret this woman has held over you so long; the secret I begged you to tell, and you would not—that I am not your child?"

"It is! Once more forgive me, Katherine!"

She lifted his worn, thin hand in both her own and kissed it.

"There can be no such word between you and me, papa. I only realize now how much I owe you—how infinitely good you have been to me. You have been better to me than any father ever was to a child before, and I—how have I repaid you? But I wish I had known—I wish I had known. Mr. Dantree"—she turned to him for the first time; for the first time the brave voice faltered—"what have you to say to all this?"

"That I have been grossly deceived," Mr. Dantree answered, lifting his gloomy eyes with sullen anger; "grossly deceived from first to last."

"But not by me. Do me at least that poor justice. And now"—she slowly drew nearer to him—"how is it to be? You swore you loved me, and me alone. Now is the time to prove your truth."

He stood sulkily silent, shifting away, however, from the gaze of those solemn, searching eyes.

The spectators looked on—Mrs. Vavasor with a face of triumphant, malicious delight, Peter Dangerfield full of vengeful exultation, and the old baronet with eyes beginning to flash ominously. The silver shining figure of the bride stood on the hearth-rug, the dull red glow of the cinders lighting her luridly up, waiting for her false lover's answer.

It did not come; after that one fleeting glance, he stood staring doggedly into the fire.

"I am answered," Katherine said; "and all the warnings I received were right. I might have known it; I was a fool, and I am only reaping a fool's reward. It was the heiress of Scarswood you wanted; the eight thousand a year you loved—not plain Katherine Dangerfield. Take your ring, Mr. Dantree, and thank Heaven—as I do—that truth has come to light an hour before our marriage instead of an hour after. Take your ring, and go!"

She drew it off and held it out to him

He started up as if to obey.

"Curse the ring!" he exclaimed ferociously; "throw it into the fire if you like. *I* don't want anything to remind me of this night's work. I say again," raising his voice, "I have been shamefully tricked and deceived. I'm a great deal more thankful than you can possibly be that the truth has come out in time. And now, as I suppose everything has been said that it is necessary to say, I may take my departure at once, and for all."

He seized his hat, and strode toward the door. But the tall, soldierly figure of the baronet interposed.

"Stop, sir!" he thundered, in that ringing voice that had often cheered his men to fiercest battle; "all has *not* been said that it is necessary to say. Do you mean that this revelation shall prevent the marriage? that, in a word, you refuse to marry my adopted daughter, because she is not the heiress of Scarswood?"

Gaston Dantree met the old soldier's fiery, flashing glance with sullen defiance.

"Precisely, Sir John; I refuse to marry your adopted daughter either to-night or at any future time. It was the heiress of Scarswood I wanted, *not* the plain young lady who, if she will pardon my saying it, made such very hard running upon me that—"

He never finished the sentence. With the cry and spring of a tiger the Indian officer was upon him—all the strength of his youth back in his rage.

"Coward! liar! villain!" he thundered, grasping him by the throat. "Cur! that it were slander to call man. Lie there!"

He grasped him by the throat, lifting the short, light form as though it were a child of three years, flung open the door—dragged him out on the landing, and with all the fury and might of madness, hurled him crushing down the oaken stairs.

Mrs. Vavasor's shrieks rang through the house—Peter Dangerfield rushed headlong down the stairs. With a dull thud bad to hear, Dantree had fallen on the oaken floor, and lay a bloody, mutilated heap now.

The uproar had roused the house; guests, servants, bridesmaids, all came flocking wildly out into the hall. Peter Dangerfield had lifted the head of the prostrate man to his knee, and was gazing into the death-like face, almost as death-like himself.

"Is he dead?"

Captain De Vere asked the question, pressing impetuously through the throng. No one in that supreme hour asked what

had happened; instinctively all seemed to know he had refused, at the last moment, to marry Katherine Dangerfield.

The dark head moved a little, a faint moan of pain came from the livid lips. It was a terrible sight. From a tremendous gash above the temple the bright blood gushed, over face, and bosom, and hands.

"Not dead," Peter Dangerfield answered, in a very subdued voice. "De Vere, Graves and Otis are here somewhere, are they not? Send them along like a good fellow, and try and disperse this crowd, in Heaven's name. They may as well go —you see we're not going to have a wedding to-night."

Captain De Vere turned to obey—then paused. There was a shrill woman's cry from above—in whose voice no one knew.

"Send for the doctor! Quick! quick! Sir John is in a fit!"

There was the sound of a heavy fall—of a stifled groan in one of the upper rooms, then the cries of frantic women, the rapid hurrying of excited feet. Peter Dangerfield lifted his eyes from the ghastly, gory face on his knee, and glanced darkly up.

"The plot thickens," he muttered. "Another fit! And the doctors warned him to take care—that a second might prove fatal. I am Peter Dangerfield to-night, and verily a man of little account. When the first sun of the New Year rises, I may be the richest baronet in Sussex!"

Out of the frightened throng of wedding guests two men made their way—Dr. Graves, of Castleford, and his clever assistant, Mr. Henry Otis.

"You had best go upstairs, Dr. Graves, and see to Sir John," Sir John's nephew said, with grave authority. In this crisis of his life he seemed to rise with the occasion and take his place naturally as next in command. "Otis, look at this poor fellow, while I go and help De Vere to send these people to the right about."

Somewhere in Peter Dangerfield's narrow head, talent, unsuspected heretofore, must have been stowed away. He was great on this night. He got the excited, alarmed, and demoralized flock of well-dressed wedding guests together in the spacious drawing-rooms, and made them a grave little speech.

"Ladies and gentlemen, friends and neighbors," Mr. Dangerfield began in his piping little voice: "dreadful and unexpected revelations have come to light to-night. Mr. Dantree in the basest manner has refused to fulfill his contract—has absolutely refused to marry—Miss Dangerfield." The infinite

relish and delight with which the speaker said this was known only to himself. "I call her Miss Dangerfield still, although she has really no right to that name. We have all been deceived. She is not Sir John's daughter. *Who* she is he knows no more than you do. It was her fortune this dastardly adventurer from Louisiana sought; when he found that forfeit he refused in most insolent language to marry her. Sir John threw him down the stairs. If he is killed, it only serves him right. Sir John himself is in a fit of apoplexy. Under these sad circumstances I really must beg of you to leave us. Scarswood, from a house of wedding joy, has become a house of mourning. Leave us, my friends—it is all you can do for us now."

Mr. Dangerfield put his handkerchief to his eyes in eloquent silence. And, awed and terrified, the bridal company dispersed: only Squire Talbot and his sister, and the captain of the Plungers Purple lingered in the stricken house.

Katherine Dangerfield *not* Katherine Dangerfield!—a nobody imposed upon them, the resident gentry of the county! Something of imagination mingled with the amaze and horror of the night's tragedy as these good people drove home under the inky, midnight sky. And if Gaston Dantree died, they wondered, would the law really hang a baronet?

Peter Dangerfield lingered in the dining-room until the last carriage rolled away. And then what an awful silence fell upon the great house. Flowers bloomed everywhere, countless wax-lights flashed upon the brilliant scene—a temporary altar, all roses and jessamine, stood in the center of the room, and on the painted windows the Bloody Hand burned into the glass, gleamed redly out in the dazzling light. And upstairs the lord of all this grandeur and luxury lay dying, perhaps—and he was the next of kin! Peter Dangerfield strode hastily to the grand banqueting room, where the wedding feast was spread. Massive old silver, all bearing the Dangerfield crest and motto, weighed it down, crystal glittered in rainbow hues, flowers were here and everywhere.

"And to-morrow," he thought, with secret exultation, "all this may be mine."

He poured out a glass of wine and drank it. As he replaced it a cold hand was laid upon his—a low voice spoke in his ear.

"I'll take another, if you please; my nerves are horribly shaken. I saw Gaston Dantree's face." She shuddered as she said it. "Good Heavens! what a night this has been."

He turned and saw Mrs. Vavasor.

"You here still!" he said, in no very gracious tone. She had done him good service, but the service *was* done, and like all of his kind, he was ready to fling her aside. "I shouldn't think you would want to stay under this roof any longer than you can help—you of all people. If these two men die to-night, I wonder if their ghosts will haunt you You talk about nerves, forsooth! Here, drink this and go Scarswood's no place for you."

"Grateful, my Peter," murmured Mrs. Vavasor, as she took the glass; "but I scarcely expected anything better. I can dispense even with your gratitude while I hold your promise to pay ten thousand down, remember, the very day that makes you Sir Peter."

"You shall have it. Go, in Heaven's name! Don't let that girl—Katherine, you know—see you, or I believe we'll have a second tragedy before the night is over."

He left her as he spoke. On the threshold he turned to say a last word.

"Drive the trap back to your quarters in Castleford. I'll see you to-morrow, let things end which way they will. I'm going to Sir John now. Go at once—good-night!"

He ascended to the baronet's room. Dr. Graves was there, Katherine and Miss Talbot. The stricken soldier had been laid upon his bed, undressed, and everything done for him that it was possible to do. He lay rigid and stark, his heavy breathing the only sign of life.

"Well?" Peter Dangerfield said the word in a strained, tense sort of voice, and looked with eager, burning eyes at the medical man.

"I can give no definite answer as yet, Mr. Dangerfield," Dr. Graves answered coldly, and turning his back upon him.

Peter Dangerfield drew a long breath. Death was written on every line of that ghastly, bloodless face. After a brief five months' reign, Sir John lay dying—dying childless, and he was heir-at-law!

He looked furtively at Katherine. She was standing motionless at the foot of the bed, gazing on that rigid form. She had removed nothing—not a flower—not a jewel—not even her gloves—vail, laces, and silk still floated about her. Her face kept its changeless calm—her eyes their still, frozen look. It was horrible—it was fearful! He turned away with a shiver, and softly quitted the room.

"Of all the ways in which I thought she would take it, I never thought of this," he said to himself. "Are all women like her, or is she unlike all women? I never understood her—to-night I understand her least of all."

It was midnight now. He paused a moment at the open window to look out at the night. The storm had expended its fury, the rain and sleet had ceased. A wild north wind was blowing; it was turning bitterly cold. Up above, the storm-drifts were scudding before the gale, a few frosty stars glimmered, and a wan moon lifted its pallid face out of the distant sea. The New Year gave promise of dawning brilliant and bright.

"And this was to have been her wedding day, and the bridegroom lies dying down-stairs. I would not spare her one pang if I could, but I must own it's hard on her."

He went softly down the long stairway, and into the lower room where they had borne Gaston Dantree. Mr. Otis was with him still, and Talbot and De Vere.

"Is he dead?" Mr. Dangerfield demanded.

He looked like it. They had washed away the blood, and bound up the wound. He lay with his eyes closed, and breathing faintly; but, dead and in his coffin, Gaston Dantree would never look more awfully corpse-like than now.

Mr. Otis lifted his quiet eyes.

"Not dead, Mr. Dangerfield—not even likely to die, so far as I can see. What is to be done with him?—what—"

He stopped and recoiled, for into their midst a white figure glided, and straight up to the wounded man. It was Katherine. Everywhere she went, that shining, bride-like figure seemed to contradict the idea of death. Her eyes had a fixed, sightless sort of stare—like the eyes of a sleep-walker; her face was the hue of snow. Noiseless, soundless, like a spirit she moved in her white robes, until she stood beside the man she had loved, looking down upon him as he lay.

The man she had loved? He had treated her brutally—worse than man ever treated woman before, but there was no anger in her face or heart. There was not sorrow, there was not even pity—all feeling seemed numb and dead within her. She only stood and looked at him with a sort of weary wonder. Three hours ago he had been so full of life, of youth, of strength of beauty, and now he lay more helpless than a new-born child. What a narrow step divided death from life.

The four men stood silent, awe-stricken. She neither

seemed to heed nor see them Mr. Otis summoned courage at last to approach and speak.

"Miss Dangerfield," he said with grave respect, "you should not be here. This is no sight for you. Let Mr. Dangerfield lead you back to your father."

She lifted her heavy eyes, and seemed to see him for the first time.

"Will he die?"

"I hope not—I trust not. But you must not be here when he recovers consciousness."

"What do you mean to do with him?" she asked, in the same low monotone. "He cannot stay here. Will you take him away?"

He looked at her doubtfully.

"Take him—where? To the hospital, do you mean?"

"No, not to the hospital. I should rather you did not take him there. Can he be removed without much danger?"

"Well—yes; if he is removed at once."

"Then—Mr. Otis, will you do me a favor?"

"Anything in my power, Miss Dangerfield."

"Then take him to your own house. It is a great favor I ask, but you will do it I know. The expense shall be mine. I don't want him to die." A slight shudder passed over her as she said it; "and there is no one else I can ask. Will you do this for me?"

She laid her hand on his arm, and looked at him. A great compassion filled his heart for this girl, so cruelly bereaved through no fault of her own. He could not refuse.

"It shall be done. I will have him removed immediately, and if he dies it will be no fault of mine."

"I knew I might trust you. If it is possible, I will go there and see him. He must not die, Mr. Otis—*he must not.*" A sudden swift gleam came into her dead eyes. "He must recover, and he must leave here. Take him at once, and thank you very much."

Then the tall white figure flitted away and was gone, and the four men stood confounded and looked blankly into each other's startled eyes.

"What does she mean?" De Vere asked. "What does she want the scoundrel to recover for? Egad! the only creditable thing he has ever done in the world will be his leaving it."

"It is for her father's sake, doubtless," suggested Squire Talbot.

"Nothing of the sort," interrupted Peter Dangerfield. "She wants Dantree to recover for her own. If she has entirely done with him I'm greatly mistaken. I wouldn't stand in Dantree's shoes when he recovers for the crown of England. She is in an unnatural state just now—she'll awake after a little and be all the more terrible for her present calm. What will your mother say, Otis, when you turn her house into a private hospital?"

"Whatever I do is good and admirable in my mother's eyes. I will trouble you, Mr. Dangerfield, to order the carriage, and the quietest horse in the stable. Every moment we lose now is of vital importance."

Mr. Dangerfield obeyed. The carriage was brought round, the wounded man, carefully covered from the cold, raw night air, carried out, and laid among the cushions. Squire Talbot, with little love for the stricken man, yet accompanied the assistant into Castleford. Gaston Dantree had been his guest, and though, after his base and dastardly conduct to-night, he could never again cross the threshold of Morecambe, he still felt bound to see him safely to his destination.

Captain De Vere remained behind at Scarswood, at the solicitation of Mr. Dangerfield. He could not return to his lodgings while things were in this uncertain state, neither could he remain alone. How would this night end? Would Sir John recover again, or would the New Year morning, breaking already, see him lord of this noble domain?

And upstairs, in the sick chamber, the dim night lamp flickered, and only the ticking of the clock sounded in the dead hush. Sir John lay motionless, Dr. Graves sat beside him, his wrist between his fingers, counting the beating of that sinking pulse. An eminent physician had been telegraphed for to London, but it was more than doubtful if he would find the baronet alive upon his arrival. And if Gaston Dantree died, would it not be as well so?

Beside him, at the foot of the bed, looking like the ghost of some dead bride in that spectral light, Katherine sat. She sat quite motionless, her eyes rarely leaving the face upon the pillow, her hands clasped on her lap, her face like marble. "At one fell swoop" she had lost all—all! home, friends, fortune, lover, father, name, and yet it is doubtful if in these first hours she suffered much. She could not realize it yet—the suddenness and horror of the blow had stunned her; hysterics and tears and woman's uttermost agony might come hereafter

--now she sat still and calm. Her heart lay like a stone in her bosom, a dull heavy pain throbbed ceaselessly in her head, but her misery was tearless and dumb.

Dr. Graves, watching her uneasily and furtively, wondered what manner of woman this girl was. So unlike all others he had ever known, sitting here without one complaint, one sob, one cry of pain, with her bridegroom lost to her on her bridal night, the father who had adored her dying before her eyes.

And while the night light flickered, and the two pale watchers sat mutely there, the bright wintry sun arose—the happy New Year had begun. As its first rays stole in between the closed curtains, the sick man's eyes opened, and he rallied a little. His glance fell upon Katherine, a swift gleam of intelligence lit his eyes, his lips moved, and a few incoherent words came forth. In an instant she was bending above him, her ear to his lips.

"Darling papa! yes, what is it?"

He strove hard to speak, but again only that muttered, incoherent sound. But the girl's quick ear had caught three words:

"Indian cabinet—will." His thickening voice failed, his dim eyes looked with piteous, speechless agony up in hers.

"A will in the Indian cabinet—is that it, papa?"

He nodded eagerly—a flash of light crossing his death-like face.

"And you want me to get it for you?"

He nodded again. "Quick!" he said huskily, and she arose and left the room.

The Indian cabinet was in the library. There the lights still burned brightly, and there on the hearth-rug her lover had stood—the lover for whom she had been ready to give up the world and all its glory—and who mercilessly cast her off. She looked darkly that way once. "He will live," she said to herself under her breath. "And I will remember it." Then she crossed to the tall cabinet, opened one drawer after another, and searched among the papers there for the paper she wanted.

She found it without much trouble, closed and relocked the cabinet, and returned to the sick room. Sir John still lay, breathing laboriously, with a hungry, eager light in his gleaming eyes.

"Shall I read it, papa—is that what you mean?"

He nodded once more. She opened the paper—it was very short—and read clearly and distinctly its contents. It bequeathed to his beloved adopted daughter Katherine the sum

of three thousand pounds—the portion of his late wife, and was unsigned. She understood instantly what it was he wished.

"You want to sign this, do you not?"

Another eager nod, another husky "quick!"

She laid the document upon the blotting book before him on the bed, and placed the pen in his hand. Dr. Graves hastily summoned Captain De Vere, and the two men stood by as witnesses while the stricken man essayed to sign.

Essayed—and in vain! The pen dropped useless from his fingers. Again Katherine lifted, and placed it in his hand—again he strove. The effort was futile—it fell from his fingers, and with a low moan of agony his nerveless arm dropped by his side.

"It is of no use—all vital power is gone. He never will sign his name again," Dr. Graves said; "he is exciting himself dangerously and uselessly."

The dying man heard, and understood. His eyes turned on Katherine with a speechless anguish terrible to see.

"Too late! too late!" they heard him groan.

"Oh, my God! too late!"

Katherine's arms encircled him—she pressed her cold face close to his.

"Papa, darling," she said, softly and sweetly, "I don't want you to grieve for me—to think of me even. You are very, very ill—very ill, papa, and—had we not better send for a clergyman?"

He made a feeble motion of assent. She looked at Captain De Vere.

"*You* will go?" she said.

He went at once. Then she bent close to him again, whispering gently and soothingly into his ear. But it is doubtful if he heard her. A stupor—the stupor which precedes death—was gathering over him; his dull eyes closed, his pale lips muttered, he moaned ceaselessly—the great, last change was very near.

The sun was high in the blue January sky now, the whole world jubilant with the glad sunlight of the New Year. And in the town of Castleford people talked with bated breath of the strange, dread tragedy at Scarswood, and of nothing else. In a little cottage in the remotest suburbs of the town, Gaston Dantree lay, senseless still, while life and death fought their sharp battle above his pillow. And in that stately and

spacious chamber at Scarswood its lord lay dying, while clergyman and physicians stood by, useless and in vain.

She never left him—she neither slept nor ate. As she had been from the first—tearless, noiseless—so she was to the last. The perfumed laces—the dead white silk of her trailing robe—still swept their richness over the carpet; on arms and neck large pearls still shone, on her head the orange wreath and vail still remained. She had removed nothing but her gloves—what did it matter what she wore now? She sat beside the dying man, while the slow ghostly hours dragged on—an awful sight it seemed to the men who mutely watched her. Her wedding day! and she sat here bereaved more cruelly, more bitterly, than ever widow in the world before.

Morning came and passed. The short January afternoon wore on. The sun dropped low, the blue twilight shadows were gathering once more. That celebrated physician from London had arrived, but all the physicians in the great Babylon were of little avail now. Lower and lower the red wintry sun dropped, flushing earth and sky with rose-light, and, as its last red ray faded and died amid the trees of Scarswood Park, Sir John Dangerfield passed from Scarswood and all earthly possessions forever. Without sign or struggle the shadow that goes before crept up, and shut out the light of life in one quiet instant from all the face.

Up and down, up and down in the crimson splendors of that New Year sunset, Peter Dangerfield paced under the leafless trees. And this was to have been her wedding day! No pang of pity—no touch of remorse came to him—it was not in his nature to feel either. He only waited in a fever of impatience for the end.

It came. As he stood for an instant, his eyes fixed on that red radiance in the west, thinking how fair and stately Scarswood looked beneath its light, Dr. Graves approached him. One look at his face was enough! His heart gave a great leap. At last! at last!—his hour had come.

"Sir Peter Dangerfield," the physician gravely said, "your uncle is dead."

The late Sir John had been his friend; but a live dog is better than a dead lion. Sir John was dead, and Sir Peter reigned. It could do no harm to be the first to pay court to the new sovereign.

"Sir Peter!" He turned faint and giddy for a moment with great joy, and leaned speechlessly against a tree. Then

he started up, his face flushing dark red, and made hastily for the house. Never before had the old baronial hall looked half so noble, half so grand; never before had the fair domain spread around him seemed half so stately an inheritance as now when he stood there in this first January sunset, master of Scarswood.

---

## CHAPTER XV.

### "DEAD OR ALIVE."

THE funeral was over, and a very grand and stately ceremonial it had been. There had been a profusion of mutes, of black velvet, and of ostrich feathers, a long procession of mourning coaches, a longer procession of the carriages of the county families—a whole army, it seemed, of the Dangerfield tenantry and the trades-people of Castleford. For the late Sir John, during his brief reign, had made many friends, and over his death a halo of delicious romance hung. Miss Dangerfield was not Miss Dangerfield—his daughter was not his daughter, and over in that little cottage on the outskirts of the town, a young man lay—dying it might be—slain by the hand of the outraged baronet whom they were burying to-day.

It was a very solemn pageant. The bells of the town and of the hamlets about tolled all the day long. Scarswood Park had been alive from morning until night with people in carriages coming to leave cards. The principal shops of Castleford were shut, the principal church hung in black. And "ashes to ashes—dust to dust," had been spoken, and they laid Sir John, with the dozens of other dead Dangerfields, under the chancel, where sturdy Sir Roland Dangerfield, knight, had knelt (in stone) for a hundred years, opposite his wife Elizabeth, with a stone cushion between them.

The funeral was over, and in the pale yellow glimmer of the January sunset the mourning coaches and the family carriages went their way, and the dead man's adopted daughter was driven back home. Home! what an utter mockery that word must have sounded in her ears as she lay back among the sable cushions in her trailing crapes and bombazine, and knowing

that of all the homeless, houseless wretches adrift on the world, there was not one more homeless than she.

The pale yellow glow of the sunset was merging into the gloomy gray of evening as they reached Scarswood. Her faithful friend, Edith Talbot, who had been with her from the first, was with her still. The blinds were drawn up, shutters unbarred, Scarswood looked much the same as ever, only there was a hatchment over the great dining-room window, and in the house the servants, clad in deepest mourning, moved about like ghosts, with bated breath and hushed voices, as though the lord of the manor still lay in state in these silent upper rooms. It all struck with a dreary chill on the heart of Miss Talbot, the gloom, the silence, the mourning robes, the desolation. She shuddered a little, and clung closer to Katherine's arm as they went up the wide, black slippery oaken staircase, down which Gaston Dantree had been hurled. But there was that in her friend's face that made her very heart stand still with awe and expectation.

She was white as death. At all times she had been pale, but not like this—never before like this! As she had been from the first hour the blow fell, so she was still, silent, tearless, rigid. All those days and nights when Sir John Dangerfield had lain stark and dead before her, she had sat immovable in the big carved oak chair at his head, her clasped hands lying still, her face whiter than snow, white almost as the dead, her eyes fixed straight before her in a fixed, unseeing stare. Of what was she thinking as she sat there—of all that was past, of all that was to come? No one knew. People who had thought they had known her best looked at her in wonder and distrust, and began to realize they had never known her at all. Friends came, and friends went—she never heeded; they spoke to her soothingly, compassionately, and she answered in briefest monosyllables, and closed her lips more resolutely than before. The only one of them all she ever addressed directly was Mr. Otis, and then only in one short phrase, "How is *he?*" The answer as invariably was "Much the same—no worse, no better." Mr. Otis, with his keen thin face and steel-blue eyes, watched this singular sort of girl with even more interest than the rest of the curious. He was a young man who thought more than he spoke, and who studied human nature. Women at best are incomprehensible creatures, scarcely to be treated as rational beings in the trying hours of life, but beyond all of her sex this girl was a sphinx. She had lost lover, father,

fortune, home, and name all in one hour, and she had never shed one tear, never uttered one complaint. Other women's hearts would have broken for half, and she, a child of seventeen, bore all like a Spartan. Was it that she did not feel at all or —that she felt so much? Would this frozen calm outlast her life, or would the ice break all at once, suddenly and terribly, and let the black and bitter waters below rush forth?

"If it ever does, then woe to those who have ruined her," Mr. Otis thought. "This girl is no common girl, and not to be judged by common rules. I thought so from the first time I saw her—happy and hopeful, I think so more than ever now —in her desolation and despair. She loved the man she has lost with a passion and abandon which (thank Heaven!) few girls of seventeen ever feel. She loved the father who is dead, the name and rank she bore, the noble inheritance that was to be hers. And all has gone from her, and she sits here like this! Let Mrs. Vavasor take care, let Peter Dangerfield be warned, and most of all, let Gaston Dantree die, for on my life I believe a day of terrible reckoning will come."

But Gaston Dantree was not going to die; that matter was settled beyond possibility of doubt before the day of the funeral. He would live. He told her so now, as she asked the question; and as Henry Otis spoke the words, his eyes were fixed upon her with a keen, powerful look. She did not even seem to see him—her eyes looked out of the window at the gray shadows veiling the wintry landscape, a slight, indescribable smile dawned for a second over her white face.

"He will live," she repeated, softly; "I am glad of that." She looked up and met the young surgeon's level, searching gaze. "I am glad of that," she said again, slowly, "if such a lost wretch as I am has a right to be glad at all. You have been very kind, Mr. Otis." She gave him her hand with some of her old frank grace. "Thank you very much. I will repay you some day if I can."

He took the slim fingers in his, more moved than she knew. How could those wan little fingers work? how deathly white the young face! An infinite compassion moved him, and in that instant there dawned within him a love and pity that never left him. He longed with manhood's strong compassion to take this poor little womanly martyr in his sheltering arms, and hold her there safe from sorrow, and suffering, and sin, it might be, in the dark days to come.

The only hours in which life and their old fire had come to the

large, weary eyes of the girl, had been the hours when Peter Dangerfield had come into the death-chamber. Then a curious expression would set her lips hard, and kindle a furtive, ceaseless gleam in her eyes. Sir Peter! He was that now beyond the shadow of a doubt—the legal forms which would prove his right presently were only forms.

Sir Peter wore the weeds of woe well. He was pale and restless, his deep black made him look quite ghastly; his small, pale, near-sighted eyes blinked away uneasily from that statuesque figure sitting in the great arm-chair. Mr. Otis noticed this, too—what did not those sharp eyes of his see?

"I'm a poor man," he said one evening, under his breath, as he watched the dark glance with which Katherine followed the new baronet out of the room—"I'm a poor man, and I would like to be a rich one, but for all your prospective baronetcy, all your eight thousand a year, Sir Peter Dangerfield, I wouldn't stand in your shoes to-night."

And now it was all over, and Katherine, trailing her black robes behind her, was back at Scarswood. "For the last time, Edith," she said softly to her companion, "for the last time."

"Katherine," her friend faltered, "what do you mean? Oh, Kathie, don't look so—don't smile like that for pity's sake. You make me afraid of you."

For a smile, strange and ominous, had dawned over Katherine's face, as she met her friend's piteous glance.

"Afraid of me," she repeated. "Well—I *am* a hideous object, I dare say, by this time, and I don't dare to look in the glass for fear I should grow afraid of myself. Afraid of myself! That is just it—I am afraid of myself—horribly afraid—afraid—afraid. Edith," she caught her friend's arm with sudden strength, "you like me a little now—yes, yes. I know you do; and in the years that are to come I know you will hate me—hate and abhor me! Edith, I loved my father—dearly, dearly—but I tell you I am glad he is dead and buried to-night."

"Oh, Katherine! Katherine!"

"I am only seventeen," Katherine Dangerfield went steadily on, "and I am strong, and healthy, and likely to live for fifty years to come. What sort of a woman do you think I will be half or a quarter of a century from now? Think of me as I am to-night, Edith Talbot, when the time comes for you to shrink at the sound of my name—an orphan, who had no father to lose, a widow in her wedding hour, a houseless, friendless

wretch, trained to think herself a baronet's daughter and heiress."

The passion within her was rising now, strong, but surely rising. Her hands were clenched, her eyes bright in the creeping dusk, her voice deep, suppressed, and intense. Edith Talbot clasped her two hands caressingly round her arm, and looked beseechingly up in her face.

"Not houseless—not friendless, Katherine, darling—never that while my brother and I live. Oh, come with us—let Morecambe be your home—let me be your sister. I love you, dear—indeed I do, and never half so fondly as now. Come with us, and give up those dark and dreadful thoughts that I know are in your mind. Come, Kathie—darling—come!"

She drew her friend's face down and kissed it again and again. And Katherine held her tight for one moment, and then left her go.

"It is like you, Edith," she only said, "like you and your brother. But then it was always a weakness of your house to take the losing side. I do not say much, but believe me I'm very grateful. And now, my little pale pet, I will send you home—you are worn out in your loyal fidelity to your fallen friend. I will send you home, and to-morrow, or next day, you will come back to Scarswood."

She kissed her, and put her from her. Edith Talbot looked at her distrustfully in the fading light.

"To-morrow or next day! But when I come back to Scarswood shall I find Katherine here?"

Katherine was standing where the light fell strongest. She turned abruptly away at these words.

"Where else should you find me? You don't think Peter Dan—nay I beg his pardon—Sir Peter will turn me on the street for a day or two at least. Here is your brother, Edith—I don't want to meet him, and I would rather be alone. You must go."

The words sounded ungracious, but Edith understood her—understood the swift impetuous kiss, and the flight from the room. She wanted to be alone—always the impulse of all wild animals in the first throbs of pain. And though Katherine showed it in no way, nor even much looked it, Edith knew how the wound was bleeding inwardly, and that it was just such strong natures as this that suffer most, and suffer mutely.

"Going to stay all night at Scarswood alone—deuced strange girl that," the squire grumbled. 'Never shed a tear since it

all happened, they say—a woman that doesn't cry is a woman of the wrong sort. She's got Otis to fetch round that coxcomb Dantree, but now that she's got him fetched round, what is she going to do with him? She's got to walk out in a day or two and leave that little cad of an attorney lord of the manor. She never says a word or lifts a finger to help herself. And I used to think that girl had pluck."

"What would you have her do? What can she do?" his sister demanded, impatiently. "What can any woman do when she's wronged, but break her heart and bear it?"

"Some women are devils—just that," the young squire responded, gravely; "and I believe in my soul Katherine Dangerfield has more of the devil in her than even the generality of women. If Messieurs Dantree and Dangerfield have heard the last of their handiwork, then I'm a Dutchman. If Katherine Dangerfield can't have justice, take my word for it, Miss Talbot, she'll have revenge."

His sister said nothing—she shivered beneath her sables and looked back wistfully towards Scarswood. She loved her friend truly and greatly as girls rarely love; and, as Katherine had said, it was ever the way of her chivalrous race to take the losing side—a way that in troubled times gone by had cost more than one Talbot his head. A vision rose before her of Katherine alone in those empty, dark rooms, where death had been so lately, brooding with that pale, somber face, over her wrongs.

"With her nature, it is enough to drive her to madness or suicide," Miss Talbot thought. "I will go back to-morrow and fetch her with me, say what she will. To be left to herself is the very worst thing that can possibly happen to her now."

Katherine was not alone, however. There had followed their carriage to Scarswood another, and that other contained the heir and the late baronet's lawyer. Mr. Mansfield, the Castleford solicitor, was talking very earnestly concerning that unsigned and invalid will.

"You will pardon the liberty I take, Sir Peter, in urging you to do this poor young lady justice. Probably you need no urging—you have been her friend—who so recently thought yourself her cousin. Your late excellent uncle was my friend since my earliest youth—I know and *you* know how he loved his daughter—Katherine, I mean. I trust and believe, Sir Peter, you will do her justice."

The smile on the face of the new baronet might have damped

the old solicitor's hope could he have seen it, but the fast closing night hid it as he lay back in the cushions.

"How, pray, Mr. Mansfield?"

The sneer was just perceptible. It was there, however, and the lawyer remarked it.

"By giving her at once the three thousand pounds which he wished to leave her in that unsigned will, if will it can really be called, drawn up informally by himself, and speaking of her only. I suppose the knowledge of this woman Vavasor's power, and his dread of her, prevented him from making his will properly, months ago. But to those three thousand pounds, the remains of his late wife's portion, you, at least, Sir Peter, have no shadow of moral right. Legally, of course, everything is yours, but law, as you know, is not always justice."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Mansfield," the other interrupted coolly; "law and justice in this case go hand-in-hand. My late lamented uncle tried his best to defraud me of *my* rights—you can't deny that."

"He is dead, Sir Peter, and you know the old Latin proverb: 'Speak no ill of the dead.'"

"If truth be ill, it must be spoken, though the dead had been a king instead of a baronet; and I claim that I have a legal and moral right to everything—everything—you understand, Mr. Mansfield—this three thousand pounds and all. I think, on the whole, Miss Katherine Dangerfield has every reason to be thankful for the life of ease and luxury she has led—she, who, for aught we know, might have been a beggar born. There is no need to get angry, Mr. Mansfield—I am speaking truth."

"Then I am to understand, Sir Peter," the lawyer said, raising his voice, "that you refuse to do her even this scant justice—that you mean to send her forth penniless into the world to make her own way as she best can? I am to understand this?"

"My good fellow—no," the young baronet said, in the slowest, laziest, and most insolent of tones; "nothing of the sort—I shan't turn my late fair relative into the world. She shall live and enliven Scarswood and me by her charming presence as long as she pleases. But you will kindly allow me to make my own terms with her, and be generous after my own fashion. May I ask if it is to visit and condole with Miss Dangerfield that *you* are on your way to Scarswood now? I suppose we must call her Miss Dangerfield for convenience sake—her own name, if she ever had a legal right to a name, being enveloped

in a delightful cloud of mystery and romance. I wonder how she finds it to be a heroine?"

"Sir Peter Dangerfield," the old lawyer began hotly; but the baronet waved his hand authoritatively.

"That will do, Mr. Mansfield. I *have* been in your office, I admit, and I *have* been an impoverished attorney while you were a well-to-do solicitor; perhaps you had a right to dictate to me then. Our relations have changed—I deny your right now. Be kind enough to keep your temper, and for the future, your advice."

And then Sir Peter folded his small arms across his small chest, and looked with the malicious delight of a small nature through his eye-glass at the discomfited solicitor.

"I owe him a good many home-thrusts," the baronet thought, with a chuckle. "I think I have paid off one installment at least; I shall pay off all I owe before long."

They reached Scarswood—dark and gloomy the old house loomed up in the chill, gray, wintry twilight. A crescent moon swung over the trees, and the stars, bright and frosty, were out. No lights gleamed anywhere along the front of the building; except the soughing of the night-wind, no sound reached their ears.

"If one believed in ghosts, Scarswood looks a fit place for a ghostly carnival to-night," Mr. Mansfield thought; "it is like a haunted house. I wonder can poor old Sir John's shade rest easy in the tomb, with his one ewe lamb at the mercy of this contemptible little wolf."

"I am going to the library, Mansfield," the new baronet said, with cool familiarity. "If you or—Miss Dangerfield want me, you can send for me there. Only this premise: I will come to no terms with her in your presence. What I have to say to her, I shall say to her alone."

He opened the library door, entered, and closed it with an emphatic bang. The elder man looked anxiously after him on the landing.

"What does the little reptile mean? I don't half like the tone in which he speaks of Katherine. He doesn't mean to—no, he daren't—no man dare insult her in the hour of her downfall."

He sent a servant to announce his presence, the French girl Ninon; she came to him in a moment, and ushered him into the room where Katherine sat alone.

It was her old familiar sitting-room or boudoir, all fitted up with crimson and gilding, for she had ever loved bright colors

The firelight leaping in the grate alone lit it now, and before the fire, lying back in a great carved and gilded chair, Katherine sat. The bright cushions against which her head lay threw out with startling relief the ghastly pallor of her face, the dead black of her dress. How changed she was—how changed—how changed out of all knowledge. And there were people who had called her cold, and heartless, and unfeeling because she had sat with dry eyes and still face beside her dead. "Unfeeling!" and worn and altered like this.

She looked round and held out her hand, with the faint shadow of her former bright smile, to her friend.

"My dear," he said, very gently, "I do not intrude upon you too soon, do I? But I could not wait; I came with Sir Peter straight from the funeral here. As things stand now, the sooner your affairs are settled the better."

She lifted her head a little and looked at him.

"Peter Dangerfield here—so soon! He is in haste to take possession. Does he intend to remain all night?—and am I to leave at once?"

"You are not to leave until you see fit, for a thousand Peter Dangerfields! I don't know whether he intends remaining over night or not; certainly not, though, I should say, if you object."

"I! What right have I to object. The house is his, and everything in it. He is perfectly justified in taking possession at once, and in turning me out if he sees fit."

"He will never do that, my child; and I think—I hope—I am sure he will act as common justice requires, and give you at once the three thousand pounds your father bequeathed to you in that unsigned will."

She half rose from her chair; a light flashed into her face; a rush of passionate words leaped to her lips. Mr. Mansfield drew back. It was the old fiery temper breaking through the frozen calm of those latter days' despair. But all at once she checked herself—she who never before had checked a single emotion. She sank slowly back into her seat, and a strange, set expression hardened her mouth.

"You think so, Mr. Mansfield—you think he will be generous enough for that? And it is in his power *not* to give it to me if he likes—those three thousand pounds?"

"Certainly, it is in his power; but no one save the veriest monster would think of acting a part so thoroughly mean and base. He has come into a great fortune suddenly and

unexpectedly, and you have lost one. Surely no wretch lives on earth so utterly despicable as to wish to retain also the portion of the late Lady Dangerfield. Sir John's last effort was to sign that will; it ought to be the most sacred thing on earth to Sir John's successor."

She listened very quietly, the shadow of a scornful smile on her face.

"Mr. Mansfield, I am afraid there is something wanting in your knowledge of human nature, in your opinion of Sir Peter Dangerfield. You forget how long this new-made baronet has been defrauded of his rights as heir presumptive. You forget that some months ago I refused to marry him—that I even insulted him—my abominable temper, Mr. Mansfield. You forget he owes me a long debt, and that it is in his power to repay me now. And I think Sir Peter is a gentleman who will conscientiously pay every debt of that sort to the uttermost farthing."

'My dear Miss Dangerfield—"

"And that is still another injury," the girl said. "I have presumed to wear an honorable and ancient name—I, a nameless waif and stray, born in an almshouse or a hovel, very likely. And you think he will really give me this three thousand pounds? Did he tell you so, Mr. Mansfield?"

"No, he told me nothing." The old lawyer shifted away uneasily, as he spoke, from the strange expression in the large, steadfast eyes. "He said he would see you alone, and make his own terms with you. I infer from that he intends to do something. He is in the library—shall I go and send him here, or would you rather it were to-morrow?"

She was silent for a moment—looking into the fire—her mouth set in that hard, straight line. He watched her uneasily—he could not understand her any more than the others. Was she going to take it quietly and humbly like this?—she, who two weeks ago had been the proudest girl in Sussex. Was she going to accept Peter Dangerfield's dole of charity, and thank him for his generosity? or did those compressed lips, the dry, bright glitter of those eyes, speak of coming tempest and revolt? He was out of his depth altogether.

"Well, my dear," he said, fidgeting, "shall I send him, or—"

She looked up, aroused from her trance.

"Send him in, by all means," she said. "Let us see how generous Peter Dangerfield can be."

He got up, walked irresolutely to the door, hesitated a moment—then came suddenly back.

"And, Kathie," he said impetuously, "if you should fling his miserable dole back in his face, don't fear that you shall ever want a home. I have no daughters of my own; come with me to Castleford, and brighten the life of two old humdrum people. Come and be *my* daughter for the rest of your days."

He gave her no time to answer—he hurried away and rapped smartly at the library door. Peter Dangerfield's small, color less face looked out.

"What is it?" he asked. "Am I to go upstairs?"

"You are," responded Mr. Mansfield, curtly; "and as you deal with that poor child in her trouble, may the good, just God deal by you. I shall remain here and take her home with me to-night if she will come."

Peter Dangerfield smiled—an evil and most sinister smile.

"I think it extremely likely she *will* go," he said. "The two-story brick dwelling of Mr. Mansfield, the solicitor, will be rather an awkward change after the gayety and grandeur of Scarswood, but then—beggars mustn't be choosers."

He walked straight upstairs, still with a smile on his face—still with that exulting glow at his heart.

"You have had your day, my lady," he said, "and you walked over our heads with a ring and a clatter. You queened it right royally over us, and now the wheel has turned, and my turn has come. There is not a slight, not a sneer, not an insult of yours, my haughty, uplifted Miss Dangerfield, that I do not remember—that I will not repay to-night."

He opened the door without ceremony, and walked in. The room was brightly lighted now; she had lit the clusters of wax tapers in the chandeliers, and stirred the fire into a brighter blaze. With its crimson and gold hangings and upholstery, its rich velvety carpets, its little gems of paintings, its carved and inlaid piano, its mirrors, its light, its warmth, and perfume, it looked, as he opened the door, a rich and glowing picture of color and beauty. And in the trailing black dress, and with her white, cold face, Katherine, the fallen queen of all this grandeur, stood and looked at him as he came in.

She had left her seat, and was leaning lightly against the mantel, her hands, hanging loosely, clasped before her. On those wasted hands rich rings flashed in the firelight, and on the left still gleamed Gaston Dantree's betrothal circlet, a

heavy band of plain gold. It was the first thing Peter Dangerfield saw. He laughed slightly, and pointed to it.

"You wear it still, then, my fair Cousin Katherine. And he will recover, Otis says. Well—who knows—you were madly in love with him when you were a baronet's daughter. He may prove faithful, and think better of jilting you when he recovers, and we may have a wedding after all. Let us hope so. He has used you badly—infernally, I may say, but then your angelic sex is ready to forgive the man they love seventy times seven."

He took his place opposite her, and they looked each other straight in the eyes. It was the grave defiance of two duelists to the death.

"Was that what you came here to say, Sir Peter Dangerfield?"

"No, Katherine—I wonder if your name really *is* Katherine, by the way; I must ask Mrs. Vavasor; I came here at old Mansfield's request to talk business and money matters. How nice it is for you, my dear, to have so many friends in the hour of your downfall—the Talbots, the Mansfields, and that heavy dragoon, De Vere, who will do anything under Heaven for you—well, except, perhaps, marry you. And you look like a 'queen uncrowned' to-night, my tall, stately Miss Dangerfield—not good-looking, you know, my dear—you never were that—but majestic and dignified, and uplifted, and all that sort of thing. Ah! how are the mighty fallen, indeed! Only a fortnight ago you stood here ruling it like a very princess, on my soul, monarch of all you surveyed; and now—there isn't a beggar in the streets of Castleford poorer than you."

She stood dead silent, looking at him. How his eyes gleamed—how glibly his venomous tongue ran. His little form actually seemed to dilate and grow tall in this hour of his triumph.

"And that other night," he went on; "do you remember it, Kathie? Oh, let me call you by the old familiar name to the last! That other night when I—a poor, pettifogging attorney, as I think I have heard Mr. Dantree call me—I had the presumption in the conservatory to ask you to be my wife. It was presumptuous, and I richly deserved the rebuff I got for my pains; I deserved even to be called a 'rickety dwarf!' No one knows it better than I. You the heiress of Scarswood, and I not worth a rap. If I had been good-looking, even like that angelic Dantree, with a face and voice of a seraph; but ugly

and a dwarf, and only an attorney wi'hal, you served me precisely right, Katherine. You adored beauty, and Dantree was at your feet; you worshiped him, and he worshiped your—fortune; a very common story. What a pity the Fates did not make us both handsome instead of clever. What chance has brains against beauty—particularly in a woman? You served me right, Katherine, and now, in return, I am to come before you to-night, and offer you three thousand pounds—mine to give or keep as I please."

He paused, his whole face glowing with sardonic light. Hers never changed.

"Go on," she said, in a perfectly steady voice.

He came a step nearer. What did that strange demoniacal light in his eyes mean now? She saw it but she never flinched.

"Katherine," he said, "I can do better for you than that. What is a pitiful three thousand pounds to the late heiress of eight thousand per annum? I can do better for you, and I will. Why should you leave Scarswood at all—why not remain here as mistress still!—with *me?*"

"Go on," she said again in the same steady tone.

"Need I speak more plainly?" He drew still another step nearer, and all the devil of hatred and malignity within him shone forth in the gleam of his eyes. "Then I will—it would be a pity for us to misunderstand one another in the least. Last September I asked you, the heiress of Scarswood, to be my wife. You refused—more, you grossly insulted me. To-night I return good for evil—let us forgive and forget. As lord and master of Scarswood, I offer you again a home here—this time not as wife, but as my *mistress!*"

The atrocious word was spoken. His hate and revenge had given him a diabolical courage to say what he never would have dared to say in cold blood. But at the last word he drew back. He was a coward to the core, and she had shown herself before now to have the fury of a very panther. And they were alone—she might murder him before he could reach the door. His first impulse was flight; and she saw it.

"Stop!" she cried, and he stood as still as though he had been shot. "You coward! You cur!" No words can tell the concentrated scorn of her low, level voice. "You have said it, and now hear *me.* This is your hour—mine will come. And here, before Heaven, by my dead father's memory, I swear to be revenged. Living, I shall pursue you to the very ends of the earth—dead, I will come back from the grave, if the

dead can! For every word you have spoken to-night, you shall pay dearly—dearly! I have only one thing left to live for now, and that is my vengeance on you. The fortune you have taken I will wrest from you yet—the shame, the misery, the disgrace that is mine, you shall feel in your turn. I swear it! Look to yourself, Peter Dangerfield! *Living*, I will hunt you down—*dead*, I will return and torment you! Now go."

She pointed to the door. It was the most theatrical thing imaginable. His courage rose again. She did not mean to spring upon him and strangle him then, after all. He laughed, a low, jeering laugh, with his hand on the door.

"Katherine," he said, "do go on the stage. You'll be an ornament to the profession, and will turn an honest penny. That speech, that attitude, that gesture, that tone were worthy the immortal Rachel herself. With the stage lamps, and an appropriate costume, a speech half so melo-dramatic would bring down the house. And if you die, you'll haunt me! Don't die, Kathie—you're too clever a woman to be lost to the world. And ghosts, my dear, went out of fashion with the Castle of Otranto and the Mysteries of Udolpho. Think over my proposal, my dear, and good-night."

He looked back at her once as he stood there, the leaping firelight full on her white face and black robe, and as he saw her then, he saw her sleeping or waking all the rest of his life. Then the door closed, and Katherine was once more alone.

---

## CHAPTER XVI.

### BEFORE MIDNIGHT.

THE hours of the evening wore on. Sir Peter Dangerfield had shut himself up in the lower rooms, on the watch, however, for any sound upstairs. He had had his revenge—he had offered one of the proudest girls in England the most deadly insult a man can offer a woman. It was the hour of his triumph, but in the midst of it all he felt strangely nervous and uneasy.

"Dead or alive I will have my revenge." The ominous words haunted him. In the mouths of other girls they would

have been melo-dramatic and meaningless, but Katherine Dangerfield was not like other girls. She meant them, and would move heaven and earth to compass her ends.

In her pretty, wax-lit, crimson-hung room, Katherine stood, long and motionless, where he had left her. Her loosely clasped hands still hung before her, her darkly brooding eyes never left the fire. Her face kept its white, changeless calm—her lips were set in that hard, resolute, bitter line.

The sonorous clock over the stables striking eight awoke her at last from her trance. She started up, crossed the room, like one roused to a determined purpose, and rang the bell. Ninon came.

"I'm going out, Ninon—I am going to Castleford. It may be close upon midnight before I return, and the house will probably be shut up. Wait for me at the door in the southern turret, and when I knock let me in."

"But, mademoiselle," the girl cried; "to Castleford so late, and on foot, and alone!"

"I don't mind the lateness—no one will molest *me*. For the walk, I can do it in an hour and a quarter. Do as I bid you, Ninon, and say nothing to any one of my absence."

The French girl knew her mistress too well to disobey, but she lingered for a moment at the door, looking back wistfully. She loved this impetuous young mistress, who scolded her vehemently one instant and made it up the next by a present of her best silk dress. She loved her, as all the servants in the house did, and never so well as now.

"If—if—oh! Mademoiselle Katherine, don't be angry, but if you would only let me go with you! The way is so long and so lonely, and coming home it will be so late. Mademoiselle, I beseech you! let me go too!"

"You foolish child—as if I cared for the lateness or the loneliness. It is only happy people who have anything to fear. All that is past for me. Go, Ninon, and do precisely as I tell you, if you are still so silly as to have any love left for such as I."

The girl obeyed reluctantly, hovering aloof on the landing. In five minutes the door opened and Miss Dangerfield, wrapped in a velvet mantle, and wearing her little black velvet hat, appeared.

"You here still, Ninon! Do you know if Mr.—Sir Peter Dangerfield"—she set her lips hard as she spoke the name—"is anywhere in the passages below?"

"He is in the library, mademoiselle."

"So much the better—we shall not meet, then. Lock my door, Ninon, and keep the key until my return."

She glided down the stairs as she spoke, dark, and noiseless as a spirit. She met no one. Sir Peter was busy over papers, the servants were in their own quarters, the house was more silent than a tomb. Softly she opened and closed the ponderous portico door, and flitted out into the night.

It was clear, and cold, and starlight—the moon had not yet arisen. In that light no one she met would be likely to recognize her. The January wind blew keen and cold, and she drew her fur-lined velvet closer about her, and sped on with swift, light, elastic steps.

The walk was unspeakably lonely. Until the lights of the town gleamed forth through the starry darkness she did not meet a soul. She had walked so rapidly that she was out of breath and in a glow of warmth. She slackened her pace now, making for a deserted back street, and pausing finally before the quiet, roomy, old-fashioned hosterly known as the Silver Rose.

"Does a lady named Mrs. Vavasor lodge here?"

The landlord of the Silver Rose started to his feet as the soft accents fell upon his ear. The next moment he was bowing low before the slender, black-robed figure and the two grave, gray eyes.

The heroine of the day, the talk of the town, the reputed daughter of the late Sir John Dangerfield, stood before him.

"Yes, Miss Katherine. Please come in hout of the cold. Mrs. Vavasor does lodge here, but at present she happears to be hout."

"Will she soon return?"

"Well, Miss Katherine, I really couldn't say, but I think it likely. She don't hoften be hout heven as late as this. If you would please to come in and wait," looking at her doubtfully and pausing.

"If you will show me up to her room I will wait," the young lady answered. "I must see her to-night. If you knew where she was you might send."

The landlord shook his head.

"I don't know, Miss Dangerfield. She goes hout very seldom and never stays long. This way, if you please."

He held a candle aloft, and led the way upstairs, and flung open a door on the landing above.

"This be Mrs. Vavasor's sittin'-room. Take a seat by the fire, Miss Katherine, and I dessay she'll be halong soon."

He went out and closed the door. Katherine stood in the center of the room and looked about her with a certain amount of curiosity in her face. The room was furnished after the stereotype fashion of such rooms. A few French novels scattered about were the only things to betoken the individuality of the occupant. The door of the chamber opening from this apartment stood ajar, and looking in with the same searching gaze something familiar caught the girl's eye at once.

The bed was an old-fashioned four-poster, hung unwholesomely with curtains. Beside this bed was a little table, scattered over with dog-eared novels, Parisienne fashion books, bonbonnières, hand-mirrors, and other womanly litter. In the center stood an Indian box of rare beauty and workmanship. Katherine recognized it in a moment. It was one of hers, a farewell gift from a military friend when leaving India. She remembered how more than once Mrs. Vavasor had admired it among the other Indian treasures in her room, how all at once it had vanished mysteriously, and now, here it was—Katherine's short upper lip curled scornfully.

"So," she said, "you are a thief, as well as an intriguante, an adventuress. You have stolen my box. Let us see to what use you have put poor little Ensign Brandon's gift."

She walked deliberately into the sleeping-room and took up the casket. It closed and locked with a secret spring—she touched it and the lid flew back. It contained a slim packet of letters tied with ribbon, and an old-fashioned miniature painted on ivory, in a case of velvet ornamented with seed pearls.

In every nature there are depths of evil that come to light under the influence of adversity. Who is not virtuous, untempted—who is not honorable, untried? The dark side of Katherine's nature that might have lain dormant and unsuspected even by herself forever in the sunshine of prosperity, was asserting itself now. She deliberately read the address on the letters. The paper was yellow with time, the ink faded, but the bold, firm, masculine hand was perfectly legible still. "*Miss Harriet Lelacheur*, 35 *Rosemary Place*, *Kensington*"—that was the address.

She turned from the letters, pressed the spring of the picture case, and looked at the portrait within. Like the letters, time had faded it, but the bold, masculine, boyish face smiled up at her with a brightness that even a score of years could not mar. It was the eager, handsome, beardless face of a youth in the

first flush of manhood, with lips that smiled, and eyes that were alive.

"A brave, gentlemanly face," Katherine thought. "What could a man like this ever have had to do with *her?* Is this the lover she spoke of, from whom my mother parted her? Are these letters from him? Was her name Harriet Lelacheur, instead of Harman? You may keep my Indian box, Mrs. Vavasor, and welcome, and *I* will keep its contents."

With the same steady deliberation she put the letters and picture in her pocket, and walked back into the other room. There was a hard light in her eyes, an expression on her face not pleasant to see.

"On the road I am walking there is no turning back. To accomplish the aim of my life I must do to others as I have been done by. Mrs. Vavasor and Peter Dangerfield shall find me an apt pupil. Ah—at last! here she is!"

She turned and faced the door. As she did so, it was thrown impetuously open, and the woman she hated stood before her.

---

It was Mrs. Vavasor's last night in Castleford—her last night; she had made up her mind forever.

It was all over. The romance, and revenge, and the triumph of her life were finished and done. She had wrought out her vendetta to the bitter end. Her price had been paid twice over. With twenty thousand pounds as her fortune, she would return to Paris, launch out into a life of splendor, and end by marrying a title.

"I am still young—still handsome—by gaslight," she mused, standing before the mirror, and surveying herself critically. "I am one of those fortunate women who wear well and light up well. The French are right in saying you can't tell a woman from a gnat by lamplight. With my twenty thousand pounds, my knowledge of this wicked world, my host of friends, what a life lies before me in my own delightful city of sunshine. Yes, to-morrow I will go; there is nothing to linger in this stupid, plodding country town for longer—unless—unless—it be to see her in her downfall."

She paced softly up and down the little sitting-room. The hour was early twilight, an hour Mrs. Vavasor hated. Hers were no tender twilight memories to come with the misty stars. Gaunt specters of crime, and shame, and poverty haunted horribly the dark record that lay behind this woman. So the cur

tains were drawn, and the lamp lit, and the firelight flickered on the masses of braided black hair and the trailing robe of wine silk.

"I should like to see her in the hour of her downfall," she repeated. "I should like to see her mother's daughter in the poverty and pain I have felt. And I shall one day, but not here. Somehow—I am neither superstitious nor a coward, but I feel half afraid to meet that girl. I can see her now, as she came gliding forward in that ghostly way in her bridal dress, that face of white stone, and those wild, wide eyes. Ah! my lady! my lady! In the hour of *your* triumph how little you dreamed that my day would come too."

She walked softly up and down, a subtle and most evil smile on her dark small face. The striking of the little clock on the mantel aroused her; it was eight, and she had an errand in Castleford before all the shops closed for the night.

She put on her bonnet, wrapped herself in a large fluffy shawl, and tripped away. She was barely in time to reach the station whither she was bound before the shopman locked his door. She bade him good-night in her sweetest tones, and walked homeward, glancing up at the great winter stars burning in the purple, bright sky.

"And Sir John is dead, and Sir Peter reigns! *Sic transit gloria mundi!* Poor little pitiful wretch! it was like wringing his very heart's blood to part with his beloved guineas to me yesterday. I wonder how he and my haughty Katherine, my queen uncrowned, get on together up at the great house, and I wonder how my handsome Gaston does this cold January night. Ugh!" She shivered under her furred wraps. She was a chilly little woman. "This beastly British climate! And to think! to think that but for me she would be far away in fair foreign lands by this time, enjoying her honeymoon, the bride of a man she adored! Yes—I may go; no revenge was ever more complete than mine."

She was singing softly to herself as she ascended the stairs. Everything had gone so well! She had had her vengeance and made her fortune at one clever throw, and after to-night a long vista of Parisian pleasures and Parisian life floated before her in a rosy mist. With the opera tune on her lips she opened her door and stood face to face with—Katherine Dangerfield.

She stood stock still. The song died on her lips, the sudden swift pallor that overspread her face showed through all the pearl powder she wore. She had said she was no coward, and

she was not, but in this hour she stood afraid to the very core, to face this girl she had wronged.

Katherine had arisen and stood beside her, and Katherine was the first to speak.

"Come in, Mrs. Vavasor—the room is your own. And you need not look such a picture of abject terror. I haven't come here to murder you—to-night."

Her voice was perfectly clear, perfectly steady. An angry sullenness came to the elder woman's relief. She came in, closed the door, and faced defiantly her foe.

"This is a most unexpected pleasure, Miss Katherine Dangerfield. To what do I owe it?"

"And as unwelcome as unexpected, Mrs. Vavasor, is it not? To what do you owe it? Well, there are women alive—or girls, if you will, for I am only a girl—who would have given you back death for less ruin than you have wrought me. Oh, yes, Mrs. Vavasor, I mean what I say—*death!* But I am not of that sort; I am one of the pacific kind, and I content myself by coming here and only asking a few questions. I perceive there was no time to lose. I hear you leave Castleford to-morrow."

"I do." The widow's thin lips were shut in a hard, unpleasant line now, and her voice was sullen. "Permit me to add that I am in somewhat of a hurry, and that the hour is late. I must pack before I retire. I quit Castleford to-morrow by the very first train."

"Ah! Naturally, Castleford can't be a pleasant place for you to remain. You are not popular here at present, Mrs. Vavasor. I will not detain you long. Of course it is at your own option whether you answer my questions or not."

"Of course. What can I do for you, Miss Dangerfield?"

She threw herself into a chair, stretched out her daintily booted feet to the fire, and looked across with the same defiant face at her enemy. And yet her heart misgave her. That colorless face, with its tense, set expression, its curious calm, frightened her more than any words, any threats could have done.

Katherine turned her grave eyes from the fire, clasped her hands together on the little table between them, and leaned slightly forward as she spoke.

"Miss Dangerfield is not my name. You are the only one who knows. Will you tell me what it is?"

"No—decidedly."

"That is one of the questions you will not answer. Here is another: Is my father alive?"

"He is."

"My mother is dead—really dead?"

"As dead as Queen Anne, Miss Dangerfield. I suppose we may as well continue to call you so to the last, for convenience sake. Your mother is dead—and, Katherine, you've been brought up a Christian, and all that, and you ought to know. Do you suppose the dead see what goes on in this reeling, rocking little globe of ours? Because if they do, I sincerely hope your late lamented maternal parent is looking down upon you and me at this moment."

"You are a good hater, Mrs. Vavasor. Now I should like to know what my mother ever did to you to inspire such deep, and bitter, and lasting hate. You hated her alive, you hate her dead, and you visit that hate, as bitter as ever, years and years after, upon her child. I don't blame you, mind; I don't say I would not do the same myself, under certain circumstances; only I am very curious to know all about it."

Mrs. Vavasor looked at her doubtfully.

"*You* hate," she said, "and you talk to me like this—to me of all people alive. You hate—you who sit there so quietly, and speak like this after all the trouble and shame that would drive most girls mad. I don't think you know what hate means."

The shadow of a smile came over Katherine's face. She looked silently across at the speaker for an instant, that slow, curious smile her only answer.

"We won't discuss that" she said. "Perhaps I came of a weak and pusillanimous race, and there is so much of the spaniel in my nature that I am ready to kiss the hand that hits hardest. Never mind me. Time is passing, Mrs. Vavasor, do one generous thing to your enemy at the last—tell her something more of her own story. You have had full and complete revenge—you can afford to be magnanimous now."

The perfect coolness of this unexpected address won its end. Mrs. Vavasor, plucky herself, admired pluck in others, and all women, good or bad, act on impulse.

"You *are* a cool hand," she said, with something of admiration in her tone, "and I may tell you this—you are of no weak or cowardly race; the blood that flows in your veins has been bitter, bad blood in its day. And you would like to know something more of your mother? Your mother!" Her eyes

turned thoughtfully upon the fire, her mind wandered back to the past. "I can see her now standing before me as plainly as I used to see her twenty years ago, tall and stately. You are like her, Katherine—the same graceful walk, the face at once proud-looking and plain-looking—the dress of black and orange, or purple or crimson—she had a passion for bright colors, and the dark red flowers she used to wear in her hair. You are like her, and a little like your father, too; his way of smiling and speaking at times. You are most like him now as you sit there, so quiet, so deep, so resolute. Katherine, you will make your way in the world, I think—women like you always do."

"Will you go on, Mrs. Vavasor? Once more, never mind me."

Mrs. Vavasor laughed—all her airy, easy self again.

"And you really are anxious like this to know why I hated—why I still hate your dead mother? Well—I am in the humor to gratify you to-night—I have locked the past so closely up for such a length of time, that it is something of a relief and a pleasure to unlock it to-night. But to think I should tell it to you—to you! These things come about so queerly—life is all so queer—such a dizzy, whirling, merry-go-round, and we all jumping-jacks, who just dance as our strings are pulled. And they call us responsible beings, and they tell us we can shape our own lives! Why look you. I might have been a good woman—a rich woman—a model British matron—sitting at the head of a husband's table—bringing up children in the way they should walk, going three times every Sunday to church, visiting the poor of the parish, distributing tracts and blankets at Christmas, and dying at last full of years, and good works, and having my virtues inscribed in letters of gold on a granite shaft. I might have been all this, Miss Dangerfield, and I wanted to be, but that dead mother of yours stepped forward, interposed her wand of authority, and lo! to-day, and for the past eighteen years, I have been a Bohemian—houseless, friendless, penniless, and reputationless. Now, listen—here is the story. No names, mind; no questions when I have done. All you are to know I will tell you. Your father lives—you have hosts of relatives alive, for that matter, but I don't mean you shall ever see or know any of them."

She sank back in her chair, played with her watch-chain, looked at the fire, and told her story in rapid words.

"Your mother was just my age when I first knew her—a little the elder, I think—and just married. She wasn't hand

some, but somehow she was attractive—most people liked her—I did myself for a time. And she was a great heiress, she was the wife of the handsomest man in England, and she loved him—ah, well! as you loved poor Mr. Dantree, perhaps, and not much more wisely.

"I lived with her—never mind in what capacity; I lived with her, and knew more of her than any other human being alive, including her husband. Indeed after the honeymoon—and *how* he used to yawn and smoke during the honeymoon—he saw as little of her as possible. She was the woman he was married to, and the woman he loved was as beautiful as all the angels, and not worth a farthing. It's a very old state of things, Miss Dangerfield—nothing novel about it. Your mother was frantically jealous, and having the temper of a spoiled child, made his lor—I mean, made your father's life a martyrdom, with endless tears and reproaches. When she sat sobbing sometimes, swelling her eyes, and reddening her nose, and looking very ugly, I used to pity her, and once I ventured to offer my humble sympathy, and call my—her husband a wretch. Do you know how she received it? She jumped up and slapped my face."

"I am glad to hear it," Katherine said, with composure. "She served you right."

"Ah! no doubt! *You* would have done the same, I am sure. Well, it was about that time the romance of my life began. Your mother's brother came from Ireland to make her a visit, and we met. He was only twenty; I was your age, seventeen. He was handsome and poor—your mother had got all the money, he all the beauty of the family. I was—my modesty makes me hesitate to say it—considered pretty in those days—that is, in a certain gypsy style of prettiness. It was a style that suited him, at least, and we looked at each other, and fell in love, and earth turned to Paradise, and we were among the blest.

"I don't need to tell you what followed, do I?—the meetings by chance, the appointments, the twilight walk, the moonlight rambles, the delicious blissful folly of it all? No need to tell you—your own experience is recent. Let me skip the sentimental and keep to hard facts. A month passed—courtship progresses rapidly with two people of twenty and seventeen. We were engaged and we must be married at once, or life would be insupportable. But how? Youths of twenty and girls of seventeen cannot marry clandestinely and yet legally

in England, except under very great difficulties—under perjury, in fact. As deeply as he adored me, he was not prepared to perjure himself on my account. We must try a Scotch marriage for it—there was nothing else—and think about the legality afterward. He was poor—I was poorer. What we were to live on after marriage was an unanswerable question. We never tried to answer it—we must be married first at all risks—time enough to think of all these prosaic details after.

"No one suspected our secret—his folly and my presumption, that is what they termed it. We had fixed the day of our flight—we had packed our portmanteaus—in less than a week we would be in Scotland, and united as fast as Scottish marriage laws can unite, when all of a sudden my la—your mother's sharp, gray eyes were opened and saw the truth. A note of his to me fell into her hands and she opened and read it. Not an honorable thing to do—eh, Katherine? It told her all—of our flight in two days, of our proposed marriage—all.

"I have told you, Katherine, that you are like your mother. You are. You have taken all your troubles quietly, and made no outcry, no complaint. She took things quietly, too. Three hours after she got that note she came to me, quiet, composed, and determined.

"'Harriet,' she said, 'I am going into the country for a day—only a day. Pack a few things and be ready to accompany me in an hour.'

"I stood confounded. *He* was away; what would he say when he came back. But it was impossible for me to disobey, and then—only for a day. We would be back in time after all.

"For a day! Katherine, she never stopped until we were in Cornwall. She had an uncle, a rector there; he and his wife lived in a lonesome old gray house on the sea-coast. It was late at night when the rumbling stage-coach brought us to the door; and I was worn out with fatigue. I asked for some tea; my—your mother gave it to me graciously, with her own hand, a smile on her lips, and a sleeping potion in the cup.

"'You must be tired, my poor Harriet,' she said; 'and you didn't think we were coming all the way to Cornwall. No more did I, but I took a sudden fancy to pay the old place a flying visit.'

"'A flying visit?' I repeated wearily. 'Then you mean—'

"'To return to town to-morrow, my dear child. Certainly you don't suppose *I* could exist here, and in the height of the London season too? But I think country air and solitude will

do *you* good. Good-night, Harriet; you look sleepy; don't let me keep you awake.'

"I remember her laughing as she went out, then my eyelids swayed and fell, and I slept the sleep of the drugged.

"The noon sunshine of the next day filled my room when I awoke. I was still lying back in my chair, dressed. I had not been to bed. My head ached, my eyes felt hot and heavy—I was unused to opium in any shape then, and its effects sickened me. I struggled wearily with memory. With a sharp pang I recollected it was the day fixed for my wedding day, and I was here alone, and he was—where?

"And she had done it all. The first glow of that fire of quenchless hate that has burned ever since kindled in my heart then. I went downstairs sullenly enough, and asked the rector's lady for my mist—for your mother. And the rector's lady—in the secret too—laughed in my face and told me she was gone. Gone! While I slept, she was far on her way back to town, and I was left behind, without a penny in my pocket, a prisoner in this stupid Cornish rectory.

"Katherine, I shall pass over that time. It is nearly twenty years ago, but to this day I can't look back without some of the frantic misery and pain I endured then. I was only seventeen, in love, and a fool; but the pain of fools is as hard to bear as the pain of wise men. I understood it all—I was never to see him again. She had found us out, and this was her plot! I threw myself face downward on the floor of my room, and lay there for twelve hours, neither moving, nor eating, nor speaking. And then I got up and went downstairs and—kept silent, still, and waited.

"Two months passed away—two months. A short time enough, as I reckon time now—an eternity then. My order of release came at the end of that time. Old Markham, the butler, was sent for me, and I was taken back to town. I asked him just one question on the road.

"'Where was young Mr. ——?' and I got the answer I looked for. Mr. —— had joined the —th Rifles, and gone out to Canada a fortnight before.

"I said no more. I went back to town; and your mother and I met. She looked a little afraid of me in that first moment—and she had reason.

"'You must forgive my running away and leaving you, Harriet,' she said. 'It was a whim of mine, a practical joke, knowing how you hate the country, you child of London. It

won't happen again, and I have hosts of presents for you that I know you will be charmed with.'

"I thanked her, and took the presents—took everything that was given to me, and bided my time. I knew, just as well as though she had told me, how she had laughed and ridiculed her brother into the army, and out of England. I knew it all, and she knew that I knew it, but we never spoke of it—never once—until the hour of her death.

"There, Katherine! that is my story; that is the secret of my hatred of your mother. Don't you think she deserved it?"

"From you—yes," Katherine answered promptly; "at the same time I think she did exactly right. She knew what you were, doubtless, and took the only means of saving her brother. Gentlemen and officers don't, as a rule, marry their sisters' waiting maids."

Mrs. Vavasor sprang to her feet. That random arrow had sped home.

"It is false!" she gasped. "I was no waiting-maid—you know nothing—"

"It is true!" exclaimed Katherine, also rising. "You were a waiting-maid—and I know all I desire to know at present. My mother was a lady, her brother was an officer in the —th Rifles, my father lives and will recognize his old servant when he sees her, Harriet Lelacheur!"

Mrs. Vavasor stood white, terrified, dumb. Good Heavens! what a fool she had been to speak at all to such a girl as this.

"You see I know your real name, among your many *aliases*. As I have found out that, so I shall find out all the rest. As surely as we both live and stand here, I shall one day discover my father and punish *you*. I devote my life to that purpose—to finding out who I am, that I may be revenged on my enemies. On you, on Peter Dangerfield, on Gaston Dantree. I shall one day be avenged for all the bitter, cruel wrong you have done me. I am only a girl, alone in the world, without friends or money, but I shall keep my word. Secretly and in the dark as you have worked, so I shall work, and when my time comes the mercy you have shown will be dealt back to you. Now good-night, Mrs. Vavasor. We understand each other, I think."

She opened the door, looked back once, darkly, menacingly, then it closed after her, and she was gone.

Ninon sat up for her mistress. It was close upon midnight when that mistress reached Scarswood. But she felt no fatigue

—some inward spirit, whether of good or evil, sustained her. As she parted with the girl she laid two sovereigns in her hand.

"You have been a good girl, Ninon," she said, kindly, "to a very capricious mistress. Thank you for all your patience and good-night."

She went to her room, but not to sleep. It was disordered —she set it to rights. Her jewels—all—lay in their velvet and ivory caskets, her rich dresses hung in the wardrobe and closets, her bridal dress among them. She took a small portmanteau, packed a few articles of dress and linen, a few of her most cherished presents, one or two books and souvenirs, closed and locked it. Then, still dressed as she was, she sat down by the window and waited for the dawn.

It came—rosy and golden, and touched the eastern windows into flame. Then she arose, and taking the portmanteau in her hand, went softly out down the stairs and along to that door in the turret by which she had gone out and come in last night. She closed it noiselessly—the household were not yet astir—and walked rapidly down the crisp, frozen avenue to the gates. The rising sun shot red lances through the brown boles of the trees, gilded the many windows and turrets and tall chimneys of the old hall, making a wonderfully bright and fair picture of early morning beauty, had she but turned to see.

But she never once looked back.

---

## CHAPTER XVII.

### "RESURGAM."

AND how is your patient to-night, Mrs. Otis? Any change for the better yet?"

Dr. Graves asked the question, blustering in like the god of the wind. A high gale roared without, a few feathery flakes floated past the windows in the stormy twilight In the little sitting-room of the widow Otis' cottage a bright fire burned cheerily, the red, warm light streaming through the window-curtains far out upon the frost-bound road.

A frost-bound and lonely road, utterly forsaken this bleak January afternoon, on the very outskirts of Castleford, a full

quarter of a mile from any other habitation, and flanked on one side by a low, gray Methodist chapel set in the center of a graveyard. The white and gray headstones glimmered athwart the wintry gloaming, now, like white and gray ghosts.

Mrs. Otis, sitting placidly before her pleasant fire, got up as Dr. Graves come noisily in. She was the neatest of all little women, done up in a spotless dress of bombazine, a spotless white neckerchief and widow's cap, and a pale, placid, motherly face.

"Good evening, Dr. Graves. I thought it was Henry. Come to the fire—bitterly cold, is it not, outside? My patient—well *I* don't see much improvement there, but Henry says he improves, and of course Henry knows best. Take this chair—do, and try and thaw out."

Dr. Graves took the cushioned rocker, and spread himself out luxuriously to the blaze.

"Where is Henry? I wanted to see him."

"Oh, among his poor patients somewhere—he will be along to tea presently. Any news to-night, doctor? I mean—"

"You mean the Scarswood tragedy, of course, ma'am—nobody in Sussex, I believe, talks of anything else latterly. No, no news, and no news in this case does not mean good news. The funeral is over, as you know, and there is no will, and everything falls to that pitiful, pettifogging little screw of an attorney, Peter Dangerfield—everything, Mrs. Otis—everything. He's Sir Peter now; and among all the baronets who have reigned at Scarswood since the days of James I., I don't believe *such* a baronet ever disgraced a good old name. She's not got a rap, not a farthing, ma'am—poor as a church mouse, and poorer, for church mice can steal, if they get a chance, and she can't. She's got to work now, Mrs. Otis—got to go out into the hard world and earn the bread and beef of everyday life. Nursery governess or something of that sort; she isn't qualified even for that, poor thing! poor thing!"

"But, Doctor Graves, this seems a little too dreadful—too cruel. Where are all her friends—all our resident gentry? Must all turn their backs upon her because she chances not to be Sir John's real daughter?"

"She's down in the world, Mrs. Otis, and it's the way of the world to speed the miserable sinner who falls with a parting kick. Still in this case a few have come forward and offered her a home generously enough—the Talbots, for instance, and old Mansfield the lawyer But she's a young woman of a very

uncommon stamp, ma'am, and charity's charity, gloss it over as you may. She has acted very strangely from the first, in the last way any reasonable man might expect. But you never can tell by what you previously knew of her how a *woman* will act in any given emergency. The Turks and other heathens who don't treat them as rational beings are in the right of it. They're not! Don't laugh, Mrs. Otis, it's nothing to laugh at. There's that young woman! Quick-tempered, passionate, proud, generous, loving, just the sort of young woman to break out into tears and hysterics, and sobs and reproaches, making the place too hot for everybody, tearing her hair and rending her garments. Well, how does she act instead? Sits there like a stone, never says a word, never sheds a tear, and broods, broods in sullen silence. Women who don't cry and scold are women to be distrusted, ma'am. If I had seen her in hysterics I would have pitied her; as it is I honestly declare she frightens me. Now then, ma'am, I'll take a look at our wounded snake in the grass, and be off before it gets any later and colder."

He jumped up and stalked away to a large, airy chamber opening off this cosey sitting-room. Like everything else in and around the widow's cottage, it was daintily neat and clean. The last rays of the chill January day came through the muslin curtains and fell upon Gaston Dantree, lying motionless upon the bed.

It was an awfully death-like face—in his coffin the man would hardly look more ghastly, more utterly bloodless and lifeless than now. His faint breathing, his fluttering pulse were barely perceptible—no more. His damp, dark hair fell loose and curly over the white pillows, and in all its spectral bloodlessness his rarely perfect face kept its dark Southern beauty still.

Dr. Graves took his wrist between his fingers and thumb, drew out his watch, gave his head a little professional shake, and prepared to count with that owl-like solemnity of visage venerable physicians counting a patient's pulse ever do wear.

And over her coal fire little Mrs. Otis sat and mused sadly enough on the fate of that unhappy young lady who a few brief days ago had been the brightest and most blissful of petted heiresses and happy brides elect.

"And how strange among all she knew—Dr. Graves and all—she should have chosen my Henry to come forward and cure the man she loved," she thought with that glow of pride widowed

mothers of only sons always feel. "No doubt she knew, if others are too stupid to find it out, how clever he is, how good, how thoughtful, how kind! No woman could ever be more tender in a sick room than he; and if it be possible for earthly physician or earthly drugs to bring this ill-fated young man round, Henry is the one to do it. But I doubt it—I doubt it. He looks like death, and he knows nothing or nobody. Hark! here is Henry now!"

She started forward. The front hall door opened, a quick footstep crossed the passage, the sitting-room door was flung wide, and Mr. Henry Otis, "booted and spurred," stood pale as a ghost before his mother.

"Henry!" the word was a low, frightened cry, but Henry Otis' eyes turned from her to the bedroom.

"Is she here? Who is that?" He strode across the room to the inner chamber, then fell back with a look of sick disappointment. "Dr. Graves!" he said, "only you. And I was sure I should find her here."

"Find whom here? What do you mean, young man?"

"I mean Miss Dangerfield. What! don't you know? She ran away either last night or this morning from Scarswood, and no tale or tidings of her are to be found. I thought she might have come here to—to see him."

He crossed abruptly to the fire, and stood staring into it with a greatly disturbed face.

"Run away!" the widow and the doctor both exclaimed.

"Yes—run away—to her death, most likely."

"Henry! Good Heaven!"

"Women have been driven to their death before now by men—girls have committed suicide for less than *she* has undergone. It is not those who make most outcry over their troubles who feel them deepest. What has she left to live for—robbed of all at one blow?"

He spoke bitterly—more bitterly than they dreamed he felt. Months ago he had lifted his eyes to the darkly brilliant heiress of Scarswood, and had been mad enough to fall in love with her. To him she had looked the fairest, brightest, best of women, and not his own mother had ever guessed it. But some of the sharp, cruel pain of loss broke out of his voice now.

"When I think of her, and of him—the traitor—the dastard!"—he looked angrily toward the sick room—"I feel as though I should like to strangle him. If she *is* dead, then Peter Dangerfield and Gaston Dantree are as surely murderers as ever Cain was."

"Mr. Henry Otis," exclaimed Dr. Graves, with asperity, "*will* you restrain this incoherent language and violent manner, and tell us in a composed and Christian way what has happened? Miss Dangerfield went home all right after the funeral, with Miss Talbot. Did she run away herself, in the night, or did Peter Dangerfield turn her out?"

"Scarcely that I think," Henry Otis returned. "Even he would hardly dare do that. Miss Talbot left her at Scarswood, and went home with her brother. About nine o'clock she suddenly made her appearance before the landlord of the 'Silver Rose,' where the woman Vavasor has been stopping, asked to see her, and was shown to her room. Mrs. Vavasor was out; she returned in about half an hour, and they were shut up together until half-past ten. Then Miss Dangerfield left the house alone and on foot, looking more like her own ghost, the landlord says, than herself. Her French maid Ninon let her in a little before midnight—she gave the girl money, bade her good-night and left her. In the morning she was gone. Search has been made but no trace of her as yet has been obtained. My own opinion is that she has made away with herself."

"And *my* own opinion is, she has done nothing of the sort!" curtly interposed Dr. Graves. "Only arrant cowards commit suicide, and whatever blood flows in Miss Dangerfield's veins, there is not one drop of the coward in it. She will live and to terrible purpose, as Peter Dangerfield, Gaston Dantree, and that other little villain Vavasor will yet find. Katherine Dangerfield, wherever she is in this, is not in the other world—take my word for that."

As he took up his gloves and hat, with the last emphatic words, there came a rap at the door. What presentiment was it sent Henry Otis to answer it with such a very unprofessional bound. He threw it open, and—yes—there in the spectral, wintry dusk before him stood the tall, slender, somber figure—its black robes, its white face, and great solemn eyes—there stood Katherine Dangerfield.

He could not speak a word; the unutterable relief of seeing her alive and there, for a moment almost unmanned him. It was she who spoke first, in that faint, sweet voice that haunted him forever after his life long.

"May I come in? It is very cold, and I want to see *him*."

There was something so forlorn in her look, in her loneliness, in the soft, plaintive tone—something so like a spirit about her

that the words he would have spoken died on his lips. She stood before him alive, but surely death was pictured on her face.

"Come in," he said simply; and she glided past him, and into the presence of the other two.

"My child! my child!" Mrs. Otis said, with a motherly cry; "thank Heaven, you are alive, and have come to us. Sit down; let me warm your hands—poor, little, frozen hands. Oh! my child, what a fright you have given us all! Where in the world have you been?"

She sank wearily down in the chair, and let her hands lie in the elder woman's warm clasp.

"I have been with Hannah," she answered slowly; "at Bracken Hollow, with my nurse. And to-morrow I leave Castleford, and I could not go, you know, without seeing Gaston, poor fellow. I would have come before, but I—I don't know—my head feels all wrong somehow, and I think I have been half asleep all day. And the walk was so long—so long, and so cold—oh me! and I was so dizzy and stupid all the way. How warm your fire is, and how nice it is to sit here!"

Her voice died drowsily away, her head drooped against the back of the chair, her eyelids fell heavily. The three about her looked in one another's startled faces in dead silence. What did this mean?

"My child—Miss Dangerfield!" Mrs. Otis murmured. "Oh, look up; don't lie like that, Miss Katherine! Miss Katherine!"

"Yes, papa," drowsily; "but I am so sleepy, and I don't want to get up to breakfast [illegible]. Has Gaston come? It is cold for him to ride from Castle[illegible] to-night—and he hates the cold—poor Gaston! Call me when he comes, papa—I want to sleep now."

Her eyes closed heavily again, her mind was wandering. Her troubles had been too much for her then, after all, and had turned her brain. Dr. Graves bent over her, and shook her slightly.

"Katherine! Katherine!" he called; "rouse up—Gaston has come—Gaston is here!"

She sat up and gazed at him, a bewildered look in her eyes.

"Who calls?" she asked. "Oh, Dr. Graves, is it you? Where am I? Is papa sick again? Why, this isn't—" She looked around, and memory seemed slowly struggling back. "Yes, I know now—this is Mr. Otis' house—Gaston is here."

She rose up suddenly, fully herself. "I am going away, and I want to see Gaston. How is he to-night, Mr. Otis?"

"Much as he has been from the first, Miss Dangerfield—little better, little worse."

"But he will not die? Mr. Otis, you told me he would not die!"

"I think he will not; I have seen worse cases recover. It is a sort of concussion of the brain. He does not suffer, or at least is conscious of no suffering."

"Thank Heaven for that!" she said softly. "May I see him at once now—and alone? I don't know when I may see him again; and, Mr. Otis, you have been so kind, will you take care of him for me until he is quite well again? I can't pay you now—I am poor—but some day if I live, I will."

"I need no pay. For your sake, Miss Dangerfield, I will care for him gladly. I would cherish a dog that had been yours."

She held out her hand to him with the old bright grace.

"Thank you. I knew I might trust you. I must go before it gets too late. Please take me to him at once."

He led her to the chamber door. White, cold, and motionless, in the fast-fading daylight, Gaston Dantree lay. She had not seen him since that fatal wedding night, and now she saw him again—thus. She stood an instant; then she entered and closed the door. They heard the soft rustle of her dress as she knelt by the bedside, then silence fell.

No one spoke. The moments passed; the night had entirely shut down; the wind howled through the desolate churchyard, whose ghostly graves and they could see glancing in the darkness. A hushed expectation held them—of what they knew not—a strange, prophetic sort of awe. Mrs. Otis was the first to move. The mantel-clock struck six; she turned softly and lit the lamp, then stood waiting again.

Five minutes—ten—no sign, no sound from that inner room. Fifteen—twenty—the two men looked at each other uneasily. Twenty-five—thirty. Then Dr. Graves spoke.

"She has been there long enough. It is no place for her in her present state. Mrs. Otis, do you go and tell her to come out."

The little widow, full of foreboding, tip-toed to the door, and tapped. No answer. A second tap, louder; still no reply. A third rap—loudly this time, but the only answer profoundest silence.

"Open the door, mother!" called the voice of her son, sounding strange and husky—"open at once!"

Mrs. Otis obeyed—ever so little at first, and not looking in.

"Miss Katherine," she called, "may I enter?"

Still no response. Then she opened the door wide, and recoiled with a cry.

"Henry, the child has fallen—she has fainted!"

Henry Otis was in the room before the words were spoken. Katherine was lying on her face on the floor by the bedside, where she had softly fallen. In one second she was uplifted in Henry Otis' arms and borne out into the light. Her head fell limp over his arm, her eyes were closed, her features rigid. He laid her upon a sofa—the two doctors bent over her—one with his hand on her heart, the other on her pulse. The heart lay still, the pulse beat no longer. Rigid, white, stark she lay, already growing cold.

"Oh, Henry, speak!" his mother cried. "Doctor Graves, tell me, has she fainted?"

The elder doctor removed his hand from her heart, and stood up very pale himself in the lamplight.

"Not fainted, madam," he said quietly; "*dead!*"

---

Sir Peter Dangerfield sat alone in the library of Scarswood, the silken curtains were drawn; firelight and lamplight made the room brilliant; his purple easy chair was drawn up before a writing-table littered with deeds and documents, and Sir Peter, in gold-bowed spectacles, was trying to read.

Trying—not reading. For ever between him and the parchment page, a face menacing and terrible kept coming, the face of Katherine, as he had seen her last.

Where was Katherine? Dead or alive, she had sworn to be revenged. Was she dead? He shuddered through all his little craven soul and heart at the thought. Men had looked at him darkly and askance all day, and turned coldly away from him while he spoke. There had been whispers of suicide. What if while he sat here in this warm, lighted, luxurious room, she lay stark and frozen under the stars—dead by her own hand!

There was a tall, smoke-colored bottle on another table, with glasses. He was usually a very anchorite for abstemiousness, but he sprang up now, with a muttered oath, filled himself a stiff glass of brandy, and drained it at a draught.

"I wish to Heaven I had given her that infernal three thousand, and be hanged to it!" he muttered, flinging himself back

sulkily in his chair. "Curse the luck! What's the use of a title and a fortune if a fellow's life is to be badgered out of him in this way? There's that greedy little devil, Mrs. Vavasor, not a penny would *she* throw off. And now there's Katherine. I wish I hadn't said what I did to her. If they ever find—I mean when they find her—I'll give her that three thousand, if she takes it, and have done with the whole confounded thing. But she's so confoundedly proud that likely as not she'll turn cantankerous and refuse. There's no pleasing a woman any way; refuse it and you insult her, offer it and you insult her more. Oh, come in, whoever you are, and be hanged to you!"

This pleasant concluding adjuration was in response to a rap at the door. A tall, serious footman in purple plush breeches and white stockings appeared.

"Dr. Graves, Sir Peter," spake this majestic menial, and vanished.

Sir Peter arose, as Dr. Graves, hat in hand, very pale and solemn of visage, stood before him. News of Katherine at last. He grasped the back of his chair with one hand and faced his visitor almost defiantly, as one who should say "whatever has happened *I* at least have had nothing to do with it."

"Well, sir?" he demanded.

"Sir Peter Dangerfield, I bring news of—of Katherine. She is found."

The little baronet's heart gave a great leap. Found! then she had *not* committed suicide.

"Ah!" he said with a look of sulky injury, "I knew as much. I thought she wasn't the sort of girl to take arsenic or throw herself into the nearest mill-stream. So she's found, is she? And where has she been, pray, since she ran away from Scarswood?"

He resumed his chair, folded his arms, and looked up at his visitor. But still Dr. Graves kept that face of supernatural solemnity.

"When she ran away from Scarswood, Sir Peter, she went to her old nurse at Bracken Hollow. About three hours ago, while I was at Otis' cottage, seeing that unlucky chap Dantree, she came."

"She did! To see Dantree, too, I suppose. Extremely forgiving of her, I must say, but not in the least like Katherine Dangerfield. Perhaps she is going to turn romantic sick-nurse to her wounded cavalier, and end by getting him to marry—"

"Stop, Sir Peter Dangerfield!" the old doctor said hoarsely·

"not another word, Katherine Dangerfield will never marry Gaston Dantree or any other mortal man. She is dead!"

"Dead!" Sir Peter leaped from his chair as though he had been speared. "Dead, Graves! Good God! I thought you said—I thought—"

His white lips refused to finish the sentence; he stood staring with horror-struck eyes at the elder man.

"Yes, Sir Peter—dead! Of heart-disease, no doubt, latent and unsuspected. This is how it happened: She came to see Dantree before leaving Castleford—those were her words. She looked shockingly ill and haggard, and her mind seemed to wander a little. She fell into a sort of stupor as she sat before the fire and complained of her head. We aroused her after a little time, and she went into the sick room. She shut the door, and we heard her kneel down. Then there was a long silence, so long, so profound, that we grew alarmed. Mrs. Otis knocked again and again at the door, and received no answer. Then we opened it and went in. She had fallen on her face and was stone dead!"

"Great Heaven!"

"She must have been dead some minutes—ten or more, for she was already growing cold. I left her there when I found life utterly extinct, and nothing more possible to be done, and came here. It is shocking, Sir Peter—it is horrible! And only yesterday, as it were, this house was all alight for the wedding."

And then the old doctor's voice broke, and he turned his back abruptly on Sir Peter and faced the fire.

Dead silence fell. The clock ticked, the cinders dropped. Dr. Graves looked fixedly into the ruddy coals, and Sir Peter sat stiff and upright in his chair, quite ghastly to look at.

"Dead or alive, I will be revenged!" The horrible words rang in his ear like his own death-knell. They meant nothing, perhaps; they were but the passionate, impotent rage of an outraged woman, who knew his cowardly nature to the full, but they did their work. Katherine was dead! and Katherine was vindictive enough to carry her hatred and revenge into that world of shadows whither she had gone, and come back from the grave to pursue him. Greater and wiser than poor little Sir Peter Dangerfield have devoutly believed in ghosts; *he* was superstitious to the core. And Katherine was dead—dead—dead! Great, heavy drops stood on his pinched, pallid face, and his voice was husky as he spoke:

"Dr. Graves, there must be some mistake here—there *must*. She couldn't die in that way—it is too horrible—and she was so young—and so strong—never sick a day in her life, by George! Oh, it is impossible, you know—entirely impossible. It's a fit or a faint, if you like—not death. Let us go back and see what can be done for her—I'll go with you. Let us be off at once. I tell you she *can't* be dead. I don't want her to die. It's a prolonged fainting fit, doctor—take my word for it—nothing more. Strong, healthy girls like Katherine don't drop off in a minute like that."

"Sir Peter," the old physician said quietly, "I am sixty-five years of age, and for the past forty years I have seen death in all its phases—lingering and instantaneous. And I tell you she is dead. But we will go to her as you say—you can convince yourself with your own eyes."

But still Sir Peter would not be convinced; would not—could not "make her dead." He hurried from the room, changed his dress, ordered round his horse, and in fifteen minutes the two men were galloping full speed through the keen frosty night into Castleford.

The town lay hushed and dark—it was close upon eleven now. Neither spoke a word; the breathless pace did not admit of talk. They reached the Otis cottage, its whole front lit, and figures flitted rapidly to and fro. And Peter Dangerfield's heart under his riding-coat was throbbing so rapidly, he turned sick and reeled dizzily for an instant, as he sprang from the saddle. The next he rallied and followed his leader in.

On the sofa, in the little sitting-room, where they had first placed her, Katherine still lay. They had removed her hat and cloak, and loosened all her clothes, but over that rigid face the solemn seal of eternal sleep had fallen. They had closed her eyes and folded the pulseless hands, and calmly, as though sleeping, and fairer than ever in life, she lay. The haggard look had all gone and a great calm lay upon it.

So Peter Dangerfield saw her again.

There were three persons in the room. Beside Mr. Otis and his mother, the old ex-Indian nurse from Bracken Hollow, sad, gaunt and gray, sat close by her nurseling, swaying ceaselessly to and fro, and uttering a sort of moaning cry, like a dumb creature in pain. She lifted her inflamed eyes and fixed them with savage hatred upon the pallid face of the baronet.

"Ay," she said, bitterly; "you're a fine gentleman now, little Peter Dangerfield, and you do well to come and look at your

handiwork; for you're her murderer, you and that lying, false faced villain lying yonder, as sure as ever men were murderers. The law won't hang you, I suppose, but it has hung men who deserved it less. I wonder you aren't afraid as you look at her—afraid she will rise up from her death-bed and accuse you."

He turned his tortured face toward her, quite horrible to see in its fear and ghastliness.

"For Heaven's sake, hush!" he said. "I never meant this! I never thought she would die! I would give all I am worth to bring her back to life. I couldn't help it—I wouldn't have had it happen for worlds. Don't drive me mad with your talk!"

"Liar!" old Hannah cried, towering up and confronting him; "double liar and coward! Who refused her her dying father's bequest?—who offered her the deadliest and most dastardly insult it is possible to offer woman? And you say you are sorry, and ask me not to drive you mad! I tell you, if the whole town rose up and stoned you, it would not be half your deserts. I say again, I wonder that, dead as she lies there before you, she does not rise to accuse her murderer. Mr. Henry Otis, this is your house, and *she* thought you her friend. Show yourself her friend now, and turn her murderer out!"

"Hannah, Hannah, hush!" interrupted Mrs. Otis, scandalized and alarmed. Whatever Sir Peter might be, it was not in this good woman's nature to do other than reverence the Lord of Scarswood, the man of eight thousand a year.

But her son stepped forward—pale, cold, stern.

"Hannah's right, mother," he said, "and he shall go. Sir Peter Dangerfield, this house is no place for you. You have come here and convinced yourself she is dead—driven to all by you and that man yonder. He is beyond the pale of justice—you are not; and, by Heaven! you *shall* go!" He threw wide the house door, his dark eyes flashing, and pointed out into the darkness. "Go, Sir Peter, and never set foot across threshold of mine again. She turned to me in her trouble, she came to me in her dark hour, and she is mine now—mine. Go!—you coward, you robber and insulter of helpless girlhood, and come here no more!"

The fiery words scourged him, averted faces met him on every side. And, calm and white, Katherine lay before him, with closed eyes and folded hands; most awful of all! Without a word he slunk away like a whipped hound, the door closed upon him, and he stood alone under the black winter night.

Alone! Would he ever be alone again? Sleeping and waking, would not that terrible, white, fixed face pursue him "Dead, I will come back from the grave if the dead can!" Would the words she had spoken, the dreadful words he had laughed at once, ever cease to ring in his ears now? Would they not hunt him until they drove him mad?

Sir Peter Dangerfield rode home.

Home! What was Scarswood better than a haunted house now? He shut himself up in his library, lighted the room to more than the brilliance of day, locked the door, seized the brandy bottle and deliberately drank himself into a state of beastly stupor. When morning dawned, Sir Peter, lying on the hearthrug, was far beyond all fear of ghosts or goblins in heavy, bestial sleep.

And Katherine Dangerfield was dead. The papers recorded it, the town rang with it—the whole neighborhood was utterly shocked. That little cottage on the outskirts of Castleford awoke and found itself famous. Crowds flocked hither all day on foot and in carriages, poor and rich, to look on that placid, dead face. And so the tragedy of Scarswood had ended thus. Sir John Dangerfield lay in his tomb, Gaston Dantree, the brilliant adventurer, lay in his darkened room hovering between life and death, and Katherine, so bright, so dashing, so full of life and hope, and love and happiness only a few brief weeks ago, lay here—like this. "In the midst of life we are in death." Everybody shook their heads and quoted *that;* the funeral sermon was preached from it. All who had ever known her bowed down now in reverence before the solemn wonder of the winding sheet.

People came forward—two or three of the county families, the Talbots at their head—and offered to take the body and have the obsequies of appropriate grandeur. But Henry Otis set those resolute lips of his, and doggedly refused.

"It was to me she came in her trouble," he answered, "not to *you*. No man alive has a better right, or a stronger claim now than I. And I'll never give her up. She refused all your aid alive, she shall not seek it dead. From my house she goes to yonder churchyard—I will give her up to none of you."

Edith Talbot never left the house. She sat by her dead friend, weeping incessantly. Feeling against the new baronet ran very high and bitterly. No one but old Hannah knew of the terrible insult of that other night, but everybody suspected foul play. He made no appearance among them, but shut

himself up in his gloomy mansion and drowned thought in drink.

The funeral took place two days after, and they laid her in a remote corner of that little obscure churchyard, among the lowly of Castleford. A fir-tree reared its gloomy branches above the grave—a gray cross marked the spot. They laid her there in the twilight of a wintry afternoon, with bowed heads and sad, solemn faces, and the story of Katherine Dangerfield was told and done. One by one they dropped away to their homes, Edith Talbot among the last, still crying behind her vail, and led away by her brother.

And then Henry Otis stood alone over the grave of the woman he loved and had lost. He stood with folded arms while the short, dark gloaming ran on, his hat lying beside him, the keen wind lifting his hair unheeded. He had loved her as he never would love any other woman, and this was the end.

KATHERINE,
ÆTAT 17.
RESURGAM.

That was all; no second name. Who knew what that name might be, or if she really had a claim to any name whatever? And so, while he stood there, the twilight fell, and it was his mother's voice, calling plaintively, that aroused him at last.

"Henry! Henry! come home, dear! You will get your death standing there bareheaded in the cold!"

An hour later, when the slender crescent moon lifted her sickle over the blue sea-line, another pilgrim came to that new-made grave, fearfully, and by stealth.

Peter Dangerfield had not dared come to the funeral, but he came now to the grave. He was horribly afraid still, but all the same, he could not stay away. It was like a hideous dream to him. Katherine dead!—that bright, dashing young Amazon, whose laugh had rang so clear, whose eyes had flashed so bright! Katherine dead! And they call *him* her murderer!

He made his way along the little pathway, worn by humble feet, to the spot where they had laid her. The faint new moon flickered on the granite cross. He knelt on one knee, and read the inscription:

KATHERINE,
ÆTAT 17.
RESURGAM.

What a brief record it was! And, *Resurgam*—what did that

word mean, he wondered, stupidly. Then it dawned upon him "Resurgam" meant "*I shall rise again.*" 'I SHALL RISE AGAIN!"

From her very grave the dead girl spoke and threatened him.

How long he lingered there he never knew. He felt half stupefied, partly with the liquor he had been drinking, partly with abject fear, partly with cold. He was all cramped and stiff when at last he arose to go. His horse stood outside the little gate. He mounted him, let the reins fall upon his neck, while his head sank upon his breast. How the animal made his way home—how he got into the house, into his own room, into bed, he could never have told. All that shone out vividly from that night in his after life was the dream that followed.

He was wandering through a dark and unknown country—bleak and forsaken. He could see the stars in the sky, the new moon, a solitary fir-tree, and gravestones everywhere. It was one perpetual graveyard, and a spectral figure, with long, floating brown hair, and waving white arms, beckoned him on and on. He could not see the face, but he knew it was Katherine. He was tired, and sick, and cold, and footsore. Their dismal road ended at last in a ghastly precipice, where, looking down sheer thousands of feet below, he saw a seething hell of waters. Then his shadowy guide turned, and he saw Katherine Dangerfield's dead face. The stiff lips parted, and the sweet, strong voice spoke as of old:

"Living, I will pursue you to the very ends of the earth. Dead, I will come back from the grave, if the dead can!"

The words she had spoken in her passionate outburst she spoke again. Then her arms encircled him, then he was lifted up, then with a shriek of terror he was hurled over that dizzy cliff—and awoke sitting up in bed, trembling in every limb.

**Only a dream! And was this night but the beginning of the end!**

# PART II.

## CHAPTER I.

### LA REINE BLANCHE.

THE place was Her Majesty's Theater—the opera the "Figlia del Regimento,"—the hour after the first act—the time, the last week of the London season—and the scene was brilliant beyond all description. "All the world" was there, and the prima donna was that sweetest of singers, that loveliest of women, that most charming of actresses, Mademoiselle Nillsson.

Her Majesty's was full—one dazzling blaze of light from dome to parquet, tier upon tier of magnificently dressed women, a blaze of diamonds, a glow of rainbow bouquets, a flutter of fans, a sparkle of bright eyes, a vision of fair faces, and lights and warmth, and Donizetti's matchless music sweeping and surging over all.

The house had just settled back into its seats, for a few moments the whole audience had risen, *en masse*, at the entrance of royalty. In the royal box now sat the Prince and Princess of Wales, Prince Arthur, and the Princess Louise.

The bell had tinkled for the rising of the curtain upon the second act of the opera when a fashionably late party of three entered one of the proscenium boxes, and a thousand eyes and as many "double barrels" turned instantly in that direction. You saw at once that these late arrivals were people of note, and looking with them you would merely glance at two of the party, and then your eyes would have fixed, as countless eyes there did, upon the third face—a wondrously fair face. The party were the Earl of Ruysland, his only daughter, the Lady Cecil Clive, and his niece Ginevra, Lady Dangerfield. And the Earl of Ruysland's only daughter had been the most brilliant belle of this London season, as she had been of the two pre-

ceding, and not in all that dazzling house, not in the royal box itself, looked forth a fairer, sweeter face than that which looked with perfect self-possession over the audience now.

She had advanced to the front at once with high-bred composure, drawn back the curtain with one slim, gloved hand, and leaned ever so slightly forward, with a half smile upon her face. In that musical interlude, before the rising of the curtain for the second time, countless bows and smiles greeted her, whichever way she turned. All the lorgnettes in the house seemed for an instant aimed at that one fair face and queenly head, upheld with stag-like grace; but to my Lady Cecil that was a very old story, and, with all her woman's love of adoration, something of a weary one. She lay back in her chair, after that first sweep of the house, threw back her opera cloak, all silk, swan's-down, and snow cashmere, as seemingly indifferent to all those eyes as though she sat in the theater alone.

A belle of Belgravia—yes, Lady Cecil was that. It was a marvelously brilliant face on which the lamplight shone, with its complexion of pearl, its soft, large, lustrous, brown, gazelle eyes, its trailing hazel hair, bound back with pearls and roses, the haughty carriage of the dainty head, the pure Greek type of feature, the swaying grace of the tall, slight form. A rarely perfect face, and as sweet as perfect, with its dreamy tender eyes, its gravely gentle smile. You would hardly have dreamed, looking at its delusive innocence, how much mischief my Lady Cecil had done in her day, how much, the gods willing, she yet meant to do. Those brown, serene eyes, had "slain their thousands and tens of thousands," that delusively gentle smile had driven men blind and mad with the insanity called love. A pearl-faced, hazel-eyed Circe who led her victims down a flower-strewn path with words and smiles of honey, only to leave them stranded high and dry on the desolate quicksand of disappointment, where the bones of her victims bleached. A flirt by nature—a coquette ripe for mischief, a beauty without mercy and without heart—that was her character, as half the men in London would have told you.

And yet—and yet—how lovely she looked to-night! how radiant! how spotless! Dressed for some after ball, the loose-falling opera cloak showed you a robe of rose silk, *décolleté*, of course; soft touches of rich point-lace, a cluster of rich moss roses in the corsage, and lace draperies falling open from the large pearly arm. Looking at her as she sat there, you were half-inclined, knowing all the enormities, to forgive the deeds

of darkness wrought by so peerless a siren. Fair and fatal; and when in repose, even with a touch of sadness, there was something in it that made you paraphrase the words of the southern sculptor, speaking of Charles Stuart, "Something evil will befall her, she carries misfortune on her face."

Her companion was a very excellent foil to the fair, pale, pensive beauty of the earl's daughter. Lady Dangerfield was a brunette of the most pronounced type, *petite*, four-and-thirty years old, and by lamplight, in diamonds and amber silk, still young, and still pretty. Her black hair built up in braids, and puffs, and curls, by the most unapproachable of Parisian hair-dressers, was a marvel of art in itself. There was a flush on either sallow cheek—art, or nature? who shall say?—and if the purple tinting under the eyelids made those black orbs any longer, bigger, brighter, than when they came first from the hand of a beneficent Providence, whose business was it but the lady's own?

For the Earl of Ruysland—tall, thin, refined, patrician, and fastidious—he was fifty odd, with a venerable bald head, shining like a billiard ball, and two tired, gray eyes. He had been a handsome man in his day, a spendthrift, a gambler, a dandy, a member of the famous Beefsteak Club, in his youth. He had run through two fortunes, and now stood confessed the poorest peer in Britain.

Two young men in the stalls had been among the first to take aim at the new-comers, at Lady Cecil, rather, and the longest to stare.

"*La Reine Blanche* is looking her best to-night. Few reigning beauties stand the wear and tear of three seasons as the White Queen does."

"*La Reine Blanche!*" his companion repeated. "I always meant to ask you, Delamer, why they called her that. A pretty idea, too. Why?"

"From some real or fancied resemblance to that other *La Reine Blanche*, Marie Stuart—dazzling and doomed."

Starer No. Two put up his lorgnette and took another survey.

"Not fancied, Delamer—there *is* a resemblance—quite striking. The same oval face, the same Greek type, the same expression, half-tender, half-melancholy, half-disdainful. If Mary the Queen had a tithe of that beauty, I can understand now how even the hard-headed Scottish commoners were roused to enthusiasm as she rode through their midst, and cried out as one man, 'God bless that sweet face!'"

"That will do, Wyatt. Don't you get roused to enthusiasm; and don't look too long at Ruysland's peerless daughter; she is like those—what's their names—sirens, you know, who lured poor devils to death and doom. She's a thorough-paced flirt; her coquetries have been as numberless as the stars, and not half so eternal. She's the highest-priced Circassian in Mayfair, and you might as well love some bright particular star, etc.; and besides, it is *au courant* at the clubs that she was bidden in and bought ages ago by some tremendously wealthy Cornish baronet, wandering at present in foreign parts. He's a sensible fellow, gives Queenie—they call her Queenie—no end of margin for flirting, until it suits his sultanship to return, pay the price, and claim his property. Look at Nillsson instead. She's married, and a marchioness; but it's not half so dangerous, believe me, as gazing at *La Reine Blanche*."

"I'm not looking at your *La Reine Blanche*," Wyatt answered; "I'm looking at that man yonder—you see him?—very tall, very tanned, very military. If Redmond O'Donnell be in the land of the living, that is he."

Delamer whirled around, as nearly excited as the principles of his life would allow a dandy of the Foreign Office to be.

"What! Redmond O'Donnell? the man we met two years ago in Algiers—*Le Beau Chasseur*, as they used to call him, and the best of good fellows. By George! you're right, Wyatt, it *is* O'Donnell! Let us join him at once."

A few moments later, and the two embryo diplomats from the F. O. had made their way to the side of a tall, soldierly, sunburned man who sat quite alone three tiers behind.

"What? You, O'Donnell! I give you my word I'd as soon have expected to see Pio Nono sitting out the opera as *Le Beau Chasseur*. Glad to see you in England, dear old boy, all the same. When did you come?"

The man addressed looked up—his dark, grave face lighting into sudden brightness and warmth as he smiled. It was a handsome face, a thoroughly Celtic face, despite the golden tan of an African sun, with blue eyes, to which long, black lashes lent softness and depth, profuse dark brown hair, and most desirable curling mustache. It was a gallant figure, straight, tall, and strong as a Norway pine, and with the true trooper swing.

"Delamer—Wyatt—this *is* a surprise!" He shook hands cordially with the two men, with a smile and glance pleasant to see. "When did I come? Only reached London at noon

to-day, after a smooth run from New Orleans of twenty-two days."

"New Orleans! And what the deuce took Captain O'Donnell, of the Third Chasseurs d'Afrique, to New Orleans?"

"A family matter—I'll tell you later. As we only remain a day or two in London, I thought I would drop in to her Majesty's and hear Nillsson for the first time."

"*We!* O'Donnell, don't tell me there's a lady in the case—that the madness of matrimony has seized you—that you have taken to yourself a wife of the daughters of the land. You Irishmen are all alike, fighting and love-making—love-making and fighting. Ah!" Mr. Delamer shook his head and sighed faintly; "she isn't an Arab, I hope—is she?"

O'Donnell laughed.

"There's a lady in the case, but not a wife. Don't you know I have a sister, Delamer? Have no fears for me—my weaknesses are many and great—for fighting, if you like, but not for love-making. A brilliant scene this, and faces fair enough to tempt even so austere an anchorite as Gordon Delamer."

"Fair faces surely," Wyatt said. "What do you, fresh from the desert, think of *La Reine Blanche*—that brown-haired goddess, whose earthly name is Cecil Clive?"

"*Who?*"

Suddenly and sharply the captain of Chasseurs asked the question.

"Lady Cecil Clive. What, O'Donnell! has the spell of the enchantress stretched all the way to Africa, and netted you, too, in her rose chains? Is it possible you know *La Reine Blanche?*"

"No," the chasseur answered, with a touch of impatience. "I don't know your *La Reine Blanche.* I know—that is, I once knew, very long ago, Lady Cecil Clive."

"My good fellow," Wyatt murmured plaintively, "don't call her mine—she isn't. The cakes and cream of life are not for me. And it's all the same—Lady Cecil, the White Queen, Delilah, Circe, any name by which fair and fatal sirens have ever been known. There she sits, 'Queen rose of the rose-bud garden of girls.' The laureate must have had her in his eye when he wrote 'Maud.'"

The African officer raised his glass and looked long and earnestly at that brilliant vision, rose-crowned and diamond-decked. Then his glass dropped, and he turned away. Delamer looked at him curiously.

"The trail of the serpent is over all still! And you knew my Lady Cecil. How was it—where was it?"

"It was in Ireland—many years ago."

"In Ireland, and many years ago. One would think the lovely Queenie were a centenarian. *How* many years ago? Don't be so sphinx-like. Before you went to Algiers?"

"Before I went to Algiers—over six years ago."

"I hope she had nothing to do with you going—it is a way of hers, sending doomed men to exile! Anywhere, anywhere out of the world her slaughtered victims rush. She must have been young six years ago, but then some of these sorceresses are fatal from the hour they cut their first teeth. Say, *mon brave*, are you too in her list of killed and wounded?"

"Is she so fatal then?" O'Donnell asked, shirking the question.

"Fatal! fatal's no word for it! Ask Wyatt, ask Lord Longlands, ask Sir Godfrey Vance—ask—ask any man in London. The most merciless flirt that ever demoralized mankind."

"And still—at two-and-twenty—Lady Cecil Clive is Lady Cecil Clive."

"How pat he has her age? Yes, at two-and-twenty the conqueress still walks 'in maiden meditation, fancy free.' But the talk of club and drawing-room is, that early next season we are to have a brilliant wedding. Sir Arthur Tregenna, to whom she has been pledged since childhood, comes to claim her. One might say woo and win, only there was no wooing in the case. It's a family affair—he has the purse of Fortunatus, she the beauty of the Princess Perfect; what need of woo ing in such a case? And yet," with a second curious look "do you know what she told me one night not very long ago?"

"Not being a wizard—no."

"We were at Covent Garden; there was an Irish play—a new thing, and I was behind her chair. We spoke casually of Ireland, and she told me she had been there and—'mark it, Horatio'—that the happiest days of her life were those days in Ireland. Oh! no need to look like that! I don't insinuate by any means that *you* had anything to do with it. Apropos of no thing, where's that prince of followers, that paragon of henchmen, that matchless servitor of the last of the O'Donnells, your man Lanty?"

"Ah, yes, Lanty," Wyatt said; "haven't laughed once, I assure you, since I last saw Lanty. Don't say you have left him behind you in Africa!"

"Lanty is with me," O'Donnell laughed; "he's like Sinbad's Old Man of the Sea. I couldn't shake him off if I would. I'll tell him you asked."

"And you only remain a day or two in London?" said Delamer. "Where do you go—to Ireland?"

"Not at present. We go, my sister and I, to Sussex for a week or two; after that to France, then back to Algiers."

"Then dine to-morrow with me at Brooks'. There's a morning party at Kew, the last of the season, and *La Reine Blanche* graces it, of course. No doubt she will be glad to see an old friend; you will come?"

"No." He said it briefly and coldly. "Certainly not; my acquaintance with Lord Ruysland's daughter was of the slightest. I should never dream of resuming it. Call upon me to-morrow at my quarters. Here is my card. It is pleasant to see a familiar face in this, to me, desert of London."

. . . . . .

"Cecil," Lord Ruysland said, "a word with you."

The opera and ball were over—they had arrived home, at the big, aristocratically gloomy mansion in Lowndes Square—the leaden casket which held this priceless koh-i-noor. It was the town house of Sir Peter Dangerfield, Baronet, of Sussex—of his lady rather—for Sir Peter rarely came to London in the season, and Lady Dangerfield's uncle, the earl, being altogether too poor to have a residence of his own, took up his abode with his niece.

Lady Cecil stood with one slippered foot on the carpeted stair, paused at the command and its gravely authoritative tone. It was half-past four in the morning, and she had waltzed a great deal, but the pearly complexion was as pure, the brown eyes as softly lustrous as eight hours before. With her silks flowing, her roses and jewels, her fair, patrician face, she looked a charming vision.

"You want me, papa?" she said in surprise. "Certainly. What is it?"

"Come this way."

He led the way to the drawing-room—yet lit, but deserted—closed the door, and placed a chair for her. Still more surprised, she sat down. An interview at five in the morning! What did it mean?

"Cecil," he began, with perfect abruptness, "do you know Tregenna is on his way here? Will be with us in less than a week?"

"Papa!"

It was a sort of cry of dismay. Then she sat silent, looking at him aghast.

"Well, my dear, there is no occasion to wear *that* face of consternation—is there? One would think I had announced the coming of an ogre, instead of the gallant gentleman whose wife you are to be. I had a letter from him last night. He is in Paris—he will be here, as I say, in a week. Will you read it? There is a message, of course, for you."

He held it out to her. As she stretched forth her hand and took it she did not look at him. A faint flush, all unusual, had arisen to either cheek. She took it, but she did not read it—she twisted it through her fingers, her eyes still averted.

Her father stood and looked at her curiously. I have described Raoul, Earl of Ruysland, have I not?—tall, thin, high-bred, two keen gray eyes, a thin, cynical mouth, and long, slim hands and feet. "The ingredients of human happiness," says M. Diderot, pithily, "are a good digestion, a bad heart, and no conscience." The noble Earl of Ruysland possessed the ingredients of happiness in their fullest. He had never loved anybody in his life, except, perhaps, for a few months, a woman he had lost. He never hated any one; he would not have put himself an inch out of his way to serve God or man; he was perfectly civil to everybody he came across; he had never lost his temper since the age of twenty. His manners were perfect, he passed for the most amiable of men, and—he had never done a good turn in his life. He had squandered two noble fortunes—his own and his wife's, and he stood now, as Delamer had said, the poorest peer in Britain. He had been everywhere and knew everybody, and might have sung with Captain Morris:

> "In life I've rung all changes through,
> Run every pleasure down."

At fifty-six every rood of land he owned was mortgaged, his daughter was portionless, and he was a dependent—nothing better—on the bounty of his niece's rich husband, the Sussex baronet, Sir Peter Dangerfield.

They were a very old family, the Ruyslands, of course. The first had come over with Noah and the Ark, the second history mentions with William and the conquest. And the one aim and object of Lord Ruysland's life was to see his only daughter the bride of Sir Arthur Tregenna.

"I have a word of warning to give you, Queenie," Lord

Ruysland said, after that long pause; "it is this: Stop flirting."

"Papa!"

"You have made that remark already, my dear," the earl went on, placidly; "and there is no need for you to grow indignant. I suppose you won't pretend to say you *don't* flirt! I'm not a tyrannical father, I think. I haven't hitherto interfered with your pastimes in any way. You were born a coquette, poor child, and took to it as naturally as a duckling takes to water. Let me see," very carelessly this, but with a keen, sidelong glance—"you tried your small weapon first on the Celtic heart of that fine young Irish lad, O'Donnell, some six years ago, and have been at it hard and fast ever since."

"Papa!" She half rose, the color vivid now on the clear, pale cheeks.

"And again papa! I speak the truth, do I not, my dear? You are a coquette born, as I have said, and knowing you possessed of pride enough and common-sense enough to let no man one inch nearer than it was your will he should come, I have up to the present in no way interfered with your favorite sport. But the time has come to change all that. Sir Arthur Tregenna is coming, and I warn you your customary amusement won't do here. You have had your day—you may safely withdraw from the fray where you have been conqueress so long, and rest on your laurels."

She rose up, and stood stately, and beautiful, and haughty before him.

"Papa, you speak as if Sir Arthur Tregenna had power, had authority over me. He has none—none. He has no claim—no shadow of claim upon me."

"You mistake, Lady Cecil," the cool, keen, steel-gray eyes of the earl met the indignant brown ones full—"or you forget Sir Arthur Tregenna is your affianced husband."

"My affianced husband! A man who has never spoken one word to me in his life beyond the most ordinary civilities of common acquaintance!"

"And whose fault is that, Queenie? Not his, poor fellow, certainly. Carry your mind back three years—to your first season—your presentation. He spent that season in London, only waiting for one word, one look of encouragement from you to speak. That word never came. You flirted desperately with young Lennox, of the Scotch Grays, and when he proposed, threw him over. He exchanged into an Indian regiment, and was shot through the heart by a Sepoy bullet, just one week after

he became Lord Glenallan. Not a pleasant recollection for *you*, I should think, Lady Cecil; but as I said before, I don't wish to reproach you. You are to marry Sir Arthur—that is as fixed as fate."

And looking in his face, she knew it. She sank back in her seat, and hid her face in her hands with a sob, more like a child than the bright, invincible *La Reine Blanche.*

"Papa, you are unkind—you are cruel. I don't care for Sir Arthur; he doesn't care for me."

"Who is to tell us that? He will differ greatly from most of his kind if he find the lesson a hard one to learn. And you don't care for him? My Lady Cecil do you ever—have you ever realized what you are—an earl's daughter and a—beggar?"

She did not lift her face. He looked at her grimly, and went on:

"A beggar—literally that—without a farthing of allowance—without a roof you can call your own—without a penny of portion. Do you know, Lady Cecil, that I lost two thousand on this year's Derby—my *all?* Learn it now at least. We sit here this June morning, Queenie, paupers—with title and name, and the best blood of the realm—paupers! Sir Peter Dangerfield, the most pitiful little miser on earth, pays for the bread you eat, for the roof that shelters you, for the carriage you drive in, the opera box you sit in, the servants who wait upon you. He pays for them because the Salic law has exploded in England, and he is under petticoat government. He is afraid of his wife, and his wife is your cousin. That pink silk and point-lace trimming you wear is excessively becoming, my dear, imported from Worth, was it not? Take care of it, Queenie; there isn't a farthing in the Ruysland exchequer to buy another when that is worn. And I am—unkind, cruel. My dear, I shall never force you to call me that again. Don't marry Sir Arthur Tregenna. You play very nicely, sing very nicely, draw very nicely, and waltz exquisitely—what is to hinder you turning these accomplishments to account? Earl's daughters have been governesses before now, and may again. I advise you, though, to write out your advertisement and send it to the *Times* at once, while I have still a half guinea left for its insertion." He drew out his watch—a hunting watch, the case sparkling with diamonds; "I will not keep you up longer—it is nearly five o'clock."

She rose to her feet and confronted him. The flush had all faded out. She was whiter than the roses in her hair.

"This is all true you have been telling me, papa? We are so poor, so dependent as this—hopelessly and irretrievably ruined?"

"Hopelessly and irretrievably ruined."

He spoke with perfect calmness. Ruined beyond all hope—ruin wrought by his own hand—and he faced her without falter or blanch.

She stood a moment silent, her eyes fixed upon the letter—pale, proud, and cold. Then she spoke:

"What is it you wish me to do?"

"Sir Arthur Tregenna is worth thirty thousand a year. I wish you to marry Sir Arthur."

"What am I to do?" she repeated, still proudly, still coldly. "He has never spoken one word to me, never written one word that even a vainer woman than I am could construe into love-making; and as I am a pauper, and he worth thirty thousand a year, it is not to be supposed he marries me from interested motives. Does he say here," touching the letter, "that he wishes me to become his wife?"

"He does not. But he is a man of honor, and your name has long been linked with his. To have her name linked with that of any man compromises any woman, unless it end in marriage. He knows this. He is the soul of honor; he is coming here with no other intention than that of asking you to be his wife."

A flush of pain—of shame—of humiliation, passed over the exquisite face of the earl's daughter.

"It is rather hard on Sir Arthur that he should be obliged to marry me whether or no, and a little hard also on me. And this marriage will save you from ruin—will it, papa?"

"It will save me from ruin—from disgrace—from exile for life. It will give me a house wherein to end my days; it will make those last days happy. I desire it more strongly than I ever desired anything in my life. I do not deny, Cecil, that I have been reckless and prodigal; but all that is past and done with. I don't want to see the daughter of whom I have been so proud—the toast of the clubs, the belle of the ball-rooms, the beauty of London—eating the bitter bread of dependence. Cecil, it is of no use struggling against destiny, and your destiny has written you down Lady Cecil Tregenna. When Sir Arthur speaks, your answer will be Yes."

"It—will be Yes."

She said it with a sort of gasp! No young queen upon her

throne had ever been prouder or purer, for all her flirting, than *La Reine Blanche;* and what it cost her to make this concession, her own humbled soul alone knew.

"Thank you, Queenie;" her father drew her to him, and touched his lips to her cheek for perhaps the third time in their existence. "You never disappointed me in your life; I knew you would not now. It is the dearest desire of my heart, child. You will be the wealthiest and most brilliant woman in England. You have made me happy. Once more, thanks very much, and good-morning."

He threw open the door, bowed her out with most Chesterfieldian politeness, and watched the tall, graceful figure, in its rose silk, its rich laces, its perfumed flowers, its gleaming jewels, from sight. Then he smiled to himself:

"'It's a very fine thing to be father-in-law
To a very magnificent three-tailed bashaw.'

"She has promised, and all is safe. I know her well—I know him well. The thumbscrews of the holy office could not make either break a pledge once given. Ah, my lady! I wonder if you would have promised, even with penury staring you in the face, if you had seen, as I did, Redmond O'Donnell looking at you at the opera?"

Lady Cecil went slowly up to her rooms trailing her ball draperies after her, a violet and gold boudoir, a sleeping-room adjoining, all white and blue. And seated in the boudoir, still wearing her amber silk, her Spanish laces, and opals, sat the mistress of the mansion, Sir Peter Dangerfield's wife.

"What an endless age you have been, Queenie," Lady Dangerfield said, peevishly. "What on earth could Uncle Raoul have to say to you at this blessed hour of morning?"

Lady Cecil stood beside her, a touch of weariness on her pale face.

"He told me Sir Arthur Tregenna was coming—would be here next week."

"Ah!" my lady said, looking at her quickly, "at last! To marry you, Queenie?"

She stood silent—pained—shamed—humbled beyond expression.

"You don't speak, and you look vexed. Queenie," with energy, "you don't mean to say—you never will be so silly—so stupidly silly—as to refuse him if he asks?"

"*If* he asks!" Lady Cecil repeated, with inexpressible bit-

terness. "Oh, Ginevra! don't let us talk about it. I am to be sold, it seems, if this rich Cornishman chooses to buy me. What choice have I in the matter—what choice had you? We are like the lilies of the field, who toil not neither do they spin—as fair, perhaps, and as useless. When our masters come for us we go—until then we run the round of Vanity Fair and wait. Ginevra, I wonder what it is like to be poor?"

"It is like misery—it is like torture—it is like death!" Lady Dangerfield burst out passionately. "I was poor once, wretchedly, miserably poor, and I tell you I would rather die a thousand times than undergo penury again. You may know how horrible poverty is, when it is more horrible than marrying Peter Dangerfield. I abhor both, but I abhor poverty most. No need to look at me like that, Queenie; I mean what I say. You never supposed I cared for that odious little monster, did you?"

"Ginevra," Lady Cecil said, falling back wearily into an easy chair, "I begin to think they are right in those heathen countries—India—China—Japan—where is it—where they destroy female children as soon as they are born? It is miserable, it is degrading, it is horrible—the lives we lead, the marriages we make. I hate myself, scorn myself to-night."

Lady Dangerfield shrugged her shoulders.

"Strong language, my dear, and strong language is bad 'form' always. Has *La Reine Blanche* found her Darnley at last?"

"If Mary, Queen of Scots, lived in these days, she would never have lost her great, brave heart to so poor a creature as Henry Darnley. "No, Ginevra; no Darnley exists for me. Men are all alike in eighteen hundred and sixty—all talk with the same drawl, all stare out of the same club windows, all part their hair down the middle, and do nothing. Are you going?"

"Time to go at five o'clock, is it not? I only stopped in here to tell you we go down to Scarswood in three days. Send for Desiree, Queenie, and go to bed. Even your complexion will not stand forever such horribly late hours."

And then, yawning very much, Lady Dangerfield went away to bed, and Lady Cecil was left alone.

It was late, certainly, but the Earl of Ruysland's daughter did not take her cousin's advice and go to bed. On the contrary, she sat where she had left her for over an hour, never once moving—lost in thought. Then she slowly arose, crossed over to where a writing-case, all gold and ebony, stood upon an

inlaid table, took a tiny golden key from her châtelaine and unlocked it. It contained many drawers. One of these, opening with a spring, she drew out, removed its contents, and stood, with a smile half sad, half mocking on her lips, gazing upon them. Relics evidently. A branch of clematis, dry and colorless, but sweet still, a short curl of dark, crisp hair, a pencil sketch of a frank, manly, boyish face, and a note—that was all. The note was yellow with time, the ink faded, and this is what it contained, in a big, bold hand:

"DEAR LADY CECIL:—I rode to Ballynahaggart yesterday, and got the book and the music you wanted. I shall fetch them over when I come at the usual hour to-day.

"Respectfully, R."

She read it over, still with that half-smile on her lips.

"'When I come at the usual hour,'" she repeated, "and *he never came.* It was the strangest thing—I wonder at it to this day. It was so unlike papa to hurry off abruptly in that way—never even want to say good-by. And I used to think—but I was only sixteen and a little fool. One outlives all that when they grow up. Still fools suffer, I suppose, as greatly as wiser people. Some of the old pain comes back now as I look at these things. How different he was—poor, impetuous boy—from the men I meet now. When I read of Sir Launcelot and Sir Galahad I think of him. And I am to marry Sir Arthur Tregenna when it pleases Sir Arthur Tregenna to do me the honor of taking me. I have kept my relics long enough—it is time I threw them out of the window."

She made a step forward, as if to follow the word by the deed; then stopped, irresolute.

"As Sir Arthur has not asked me yet, what can it matter? As I have kept them so long, I will keep them until he does."

She replaced them, closed and locked the writing-case, and rang for her maid. The French woman came, sleepy and blinking, and Lady Cecil sat like a statue under her hands, being disrobed and robed again for rest.

But she was in the breakfast parlor a good half hour before either her father and cousin. She was looking over a book of water-color sketches when Lady Dangerfield entered, looking at one long, intently, wistfully—a sunrise on the sea. The baronet's wife came softly up behind the earl's daughter, and glanced over her shoulder.

"A pretty scene enough, Queenie, but nothing to make you

wear that pensive face. Of what are you thinking so deeply, as you sit there and gaze?"

Lady Cecil lifted her dreamy eyes.

"Of Ireland. I have often seen the sun rise out of the sea like this, on the Ulster coast. And I was thinking of the days, Ginevra, that can never come again."

---

## CHAPTER II.

### MISS HERNCASTLE.

"GINEVRA," Lord Ruysland said, in his blandest tone, and all his tones were bland, "how soon do we go down to Sussex? I say we, of course; for impoverished mendicants, like myself and Cecil, *must* throw ourselves on the bounty of our more fortunate relatives, until our empty coffers are replenished. How soon do we go—next week?"

"Next Monday," responded Lady Dangerfield; "in three days. Sir Peter writes me, Scarswood has been rejuvenated, re-hung, re-carpeted, re-furnished, and quite ready. We go on Monday; very many have gone already. Parliament closes so delightfully early this year. I don't pretend to go into ecstasies over the country, like Cecil here, for instance; but really, London is not habitable after the last week of June."

"Ah! next Monday—so soon? Then we shall not meet Tregenna in town, as I had supposed? Still—Ginevra I write to Sir Arthur Tregenna to-day—you remember Tregenna, of course. He is in Paris at present, and on his way to *us;* may I trespass so far upon your hospitality, my dear, as to invite him to Scarswood?"

They were still seated, a family party of three, around the breakfast table. Lady Dangerfield glanced across at her cousin. Lady Cecil sat listlessly back in her chair, offering her little curly King Charles a chicken wing; she held the titbit temptingly over Bijou's wrinkled nose, now laughing, as he leaped up angrily, while all his tiny silver bells rang, not once lifting her eyes.

"Certainly, Uncle Raoul, invite him by all means. Scars-

wood is big enough to hold even the great Cornish baronet. I remember Sir Arthur very well; indeed, I was mortally afraid of him in those frivolous, by-gone days, and thought him a horrid prig; but of course that was all my lack of judgment. Present my compliments and remembrances, and say we shall be delighted to see him at Sussex."

"Thanks, my dear; I knew I might count upon you. Sir Peter, now—"

"Sir Peter will do precisely as I see fit," Sir Peter's wife answered, decisively; "let Sir Peter keep to his beetles and butterflies. Did you know his latest hobby was turning naturalist, and impaling horribly crawling things upon pins? Let him keep to the beetles, and leave the amenities of civilized life to civilized beings. Queenie, do let Bijou alone; his bells and his barking agonize my poor nerves. Have *you* no message to send to Sir Arthur?"

"I think not. Take your chicken, Bijou, and run away with Tompkins, for your morning airing in the square. Half-past twelve. Ginevra, do we dress for the flower show at Cheswick, or the morning party at Kew?"

"The morning party at Kew. I promised Lady Chantilly not to fail her a week ago. But first, Cecil, the children's governess comes to-day, and I want you to see her and help me decide. I advertised, as you know, and out of the troops of applicants, this one—what's her name, again?—Miss Herncastle—seems to suit me best. And her terms are so moderate, and she plays so very nicely, and her manner is so quiet, and everything, that I as good as told her yesterday that I would take her. She comes at two for her final answer, and I should like you to tell me what you think of her."

"And I shall go and write my letter—your compliments and kind remembrances, Ginevra, and a cordial invitation to Scarswood from Sir Peter and yourself. And you tell me Sir Peter has become a naturalist? Ah! poor, little Sir Peter!"

And, with a smile on his lip and a sneer in his eye, the Earl of Ruysland arose and wended his way to his study.

Poor, little Sir Peter, indeed!

Within nine months of his accession to the throne of Scarswood, Sir Peter Dangerfield, Baronet, had led to the "hymeneal altar," as the *Morning Post* told you, Ginevra, only surviving daughter of the late Honorable Thomas Clive, and relict of Cosmo Dalrymple, Esq. She was a niece of the Earl of Ruysland, she was petite, plump, pretty, poor; she was nine-

and-twenty; she had twin daughters, and not a farthing to bless herself. At the mature age of twenty-four she had eloped with a clerk in the Treasury, three years younger than herself, a name as old as her own, a purse as empty, and they were cast off at once and forever by their families on both sides. Their united fortunes kept them in Paris until the honeymoon ended, and then Poverty stalked grimly in at the door, and Love flew out of the window in disgust, and never came back. They starved and they grubbed in every Continental city and cheap watering-place; they bickered, they quarreled, they reproached and recriminated; and one dark and desperate night, just five years after his love match, Cosmo Dalrymple, Esquire, stirred half an ounce or so of laudanum into his absinthe, and wound up his chapter of the story.

Mrs. Dalrymple and the twins, two black-eyed dolls of four, came back to England in weeds and woe, and the paternal roof opened once more to receive her. Very subdued, soft of voice, gentle of manner, and monstrously pretty in her widow's cap and crapes, little Mrs. Dalrymple chanced one day, at a water party in the neighborhood, to meet the Sussex baronet, Sir Peter Dangerfield. Is there a destiny in those things that shape our ends without volition of our own?—or is it that we all must play the fool once at least in our lives? Sir Peter saw —and fell in love. Before Mrs. Dalrymple had been twelve months a widow, she was again a wife.

Five years of married life, and living by her wits, had sharpened those wits to an uncommon degree. She read the baronet like a book. He was a miser to the core, mean beyond all ordinary meanness, half monkey, half tiger in his nature; and her plumpness, and her prettiness, her round, black eyes, her faltering voice, and timid manner did their work. He fell in love, and before the first fever of that hot fancy had time to cool, had made her Lady Dangerfield, and himself miserable for life.

She was nothing that he thought her, and everything that he thought her not. She was a vixen, a Kate whom no earthly Petruchio could tame. She despised him, she laughed at him; she was master and mistress both; she flirted, she squandered his money like water—what did she *not* do? And the twins, kept in the background in the halcyon days of courtship, were all at once brought forward, the black frocks flung aside, gay tartans, muslins, and silks bought, and a governess engaged. Scarswood was thrown open to the county, a house in May

fair leased, parties, dinners, concerts, operas—the whole round of fashionable life run. And her poor relatives fixed upon him like barnacles on a boat. The Earl of Ruysland made his houses, his horses, his servants, his cook, his banker his own, without a thought of gratitude, a word of thanks. His wife sneered at him, her high-titled relatives ignored him, men black-balled him at their clubs, and the milk of human kindness turned to buttermilk in his breast. He became a misanthrope, and buried himself down at Scarswood, did humbly as his lady ordered him, and took, as you have heard her say, to impaling butterflies on pins. If our fellow creatures are to torture us, it is some compensation to torture, in our turn, bugs and beetles, if nothing better offers.

Lady Cecil came sweeping downstairs presently—tall, and slim, and white as a lily. Her India muslin, with its soft lace trimmings, trailed in fleecy clouds behind her—all her lovely hazel hair hung half-curled in a rich bronze mass over the pearly shoulders. A Mechlin scarf hung about her more like drapery than a shawl; and a bonnet, a marvel of Parisian handicraft, half point-lace, half lilies of the valley, crowned that exquisite, gold-hued head.

The drawing-room was deserted—Lady Dangerfield was not yet down. Lady Cecil was two-and-twenty, Lady Dangerfield five-and-thirty, and for every ten minutes we spend before the glass at twenty, we spend an hour on the wrong side of thirty. She took a book and sank down among the amber satin cushions of a dormeuse near the open window, and began to read. So she had sat, a charming vision, for upward of half an hour, when her cousin, in pale flowing silks, youthful and elegant, floated in.

"Have I kept you waiting, Queenie? But that tiresome Delphine has no more eye for color or effect than—"

"Miss Herncastle, my lady," Soames, the footman, interrupted.

And my lady stopped short and whirled around.

"Ah, yes—I had forgotten. Will you take a seat for a moment, Miss Herncastle? I was really in such a hurry yesterday, when I saw you, that I had no time to speak of anything but terms. We are over-due as it is, but—I think you told me you never were governess before?"

"I never was, my lady."

Only five short words, but Lady Cecil laid down her book and looked up surprised into sudden interest. It was such a

sweet voice—so deep, so clear, so musical in its timbre. She looked up and saw a tall, a very tall young woman, dressed in plain dark colors, sink into the seat Lady Dangerfield had indicated by a wave of her pearl-gloved hand.

"Then may I beg to know what you did do? You are not, excuse me, *very* young—seven-and-twenty now, I should think?"

"No, my lady; three-and-twenty."

"Ah! three-and-twenty, and going out as governess for the first time. Pray what were you before?"

Lady Cecil shrank a little as she listened. Ginevra went to work for the prosecution in so deliberate, so cold-blooded a manner. She looked at the governess and thought, more and more interested, what a singular face it was. Handsome it was not—never had been—but some indescribable fascination held Lady Cecil's gaze fast. The eyes were dark, cold, brilliant; the eyebrows, eyelashes, and hair of jetty blackness; the face like marble—literally like marble—as changeless, as colorless, locked in as passionless calm.

"A strange face—an interesting face," Lady Cecil thought; "the face, if I am any judge, of a woman who has suffered greatly, and learned to endure. A face that hides a history."

"I was a music teacher," the low, melodious, even tones of Miss Herncastle made answer; "I gave lessons when I could get pupils. But pupils in London are difficult to get. I saw your advertisement in the *Times*, for a nursery governess, and I applied."

"And you are willing to accept the terms I offered yesterday?"

The terms were so small that Lady Dangerfield was absolutely ashamed to name them before her cousin. At heart, and where her own gratification was not concerned, she was as great a miser as Sir Peter himself.

"I will accept your terms, my lady. Salary is not so much an object with me as a home."

"Indeed! You have none of your own, I presume?"

"I have none, my lady."

She made the answer quite calmly, neither voice nor face altering.

"You are an orphan?"

"I am an orphan."

"Well," Lady Dangerfield said, "your recommendations are certainly unobjectionable, and I don't see why you would not

suit. Just open the piano, Miss Herncastle, and play some little thing that I may judge of your touch and execution. If there be one thing I wish you particularly to attend to, it is my children's music and accent. You speak French?"

"Yes, my lady."

"And sing?"

There was an instant's hesitation—then the reply came:

"No, madame, I do not sing."

"That is unfortunate. Play, however."

She obeyed at once. She played from memory, and chose an air of Schubert's—a little thing, but sweet and pathetic, as it is the nature of Schubert's music to be. It was a favorite of Lady Cecil's as it chanced, but never had the pearl keys, under her fingers, spoke in music a story half so plaintive, half so pathetic as this. The slanting June sunlight fell full upon the face of the player—that fixed, dusk, emotionless face, with its changeless pallor; and, more and more interested, Lady Cecil half rose on her elbow to look.

"That will do," Ginevra said graciously; "that's a simple melody, but you play it quite prettily. Cecil, love, what do you think? Miss Herncastle will suit very well, will she not?"

"I think Miss Herncastle quite capable of teaching music to pupils double the age of Pearl and Pansy," replied Lady Cecil, decidedly. "Miss Herncastle, is it possible you do not sing? You have the face of a singer."

Up to this moment Miss Herncastle had not been aware a third person was present. She turned to Lady Cecil, and the large electric eyes, so dark under their black lashes, met the soft hazel ones full.

"I do not sing."

"Then I have mistaken a singing face for the first time. Ginevra, I don't wish to hurry you, but if we go at all—"

"Good Heavens! yes!" cried Lady Dangerfield, glancing in sudden hurry at her watch. "We shall be frightfully late, and I promised Lady Chantilly—Miss Herncastle, I forgot to ask —do you object to the country?"

"On the contrary, I prefer it."

"Very well, then; the sooner you come the better. We go down to our place in Sussex next week—you will find your pupils there. Suppose you come to-night—you will be of use to me in the intermediate days."

"I will come to-night, my lady, if you wish it."

"To-night, then Soames, show Miss Herncastle out. Now then, Queenie."

. . . . . .

"And what's your opinion of the governess? What are you thinking of as you lie back in that pretty attitude, with your eyes half closed, Lady Cecil Clive? Are you really thinking? or is it only to show the length of your eyelashes?"

Lady Cecil looked up. They were rolling along as fast as two high-stepping roans could carry them, Kew-ward.

"I was really thinking, Ginevra—thinking of your governess."

"You do my governess too much honor. What were your thoughts of her, pray?"

"There is something strange about her—something quite out of the usual governess line. It is an odd face—a striking face—a face full of character. It has haunted me ever since I saw it—so calm, so still, so fixed in one expression. That woman has a history."

"Really, then, I shall countermand my consent. I don't want a nursery governess with a history. What an imagination you have, Cecil, and what awful nonsense you talk! A striking face!—yes, if you like, in its plainness."

"I don't think it plain."

"Perhaps you do think it pretty?"

"No; pretty is a word I should never apply to Miss Herncastle. Herncastle!—a sounding appellation. Whom have I seen before that she resembles?"

"For pity's sake, Queenie, talk of something else. Suppose, when you get down to Scarswood, you turn biographer, and write out my new nursery governess's history, from her own dictation. I dare say she's the daughter of some Cheapside grocer, with a complexion like her father's tallow candles, and whose piano-playing and French accent were acquired within the sound of Bow Bells. Queenie—" abruptly—"I wonder if Major Frankland will be at Kew to-day?"

Lady Cecil looked grave.

"I don't like him, Ginevra—I don't like the way he behaves with you—oh, yes, Ginevra, I will say it—nor the way you behave with him."

"And why? How does Major Frankland and my lowly self behave?"

"You hardly need to ask that question, I think. You flirted with him when you were fifteen, by your own showing; you

flirted with him in the first year of your widowhood, and you flirt most openly with him now that you are a wife. Ginevra," with energy, "a married flirt is in my opinion the most despicable character on earth."

"An opinion which, coming from my Lady Cecil Clive, of all people, should have weight. Isn't there an adage about setting a thief to catch a thief? How true those old saws are! You don't mean to flirt, I suppose, when you are married?"

"Don't look so scornful, Ginevra—no—I don't. If ever I marry—what are you laughing at? Well, when I *do* marry, then—I hope—I trust—I feel that I shall respect and—and love my husband, and treasure his name and honor as sacredly as my own soul."

"Meaning, I suppose, Sir Arthur Tregenna?"

"Meaning Sir Arthur Tregenna, if you like. If I ever become the wife of Sir Arthur, I shall never let any living man talk to me, look at me, act to me, as that odious, bearded, sleepy-eyed ex-Canadian major does toward you. Don't be angry, Ginevra dear; I mean this for your good."

"No doubt. One's friends are always personal and disagreeable and prosy for one's good. At the same time I am quite old enough to take care of myself."

"Ah, Ginevra, age does not always bring wisdom. And Sir Peter is jealous—poor little Sir Peter! It is unkind, it is a shame; you bury that poor little man alive down there, and you dance, and walk, and flirt with Frankland. I say again, it is a shame."

Lady Dangerfield leaned back in the barouche and laughed—laughed absolutely until the tears started.

"You precious Queenie—you Diogenes in India muslin and Limerick lace! That poor little Sir Peter, indeed! and Miss Herncastle, too! all low and abject things find favor in the sight of Lady Cecil Clive. Sir Peter! as if I cared what that odious little wizen-faced, butterfly-hunting imbecile thought! Major Frankland is one of my oldest, one of my dearest friends, with whom I shall be friendly just as long as I please, in spite of all the husbands alive. And to think of a sermon from you—from *you*, the most notorious flirt in London—on flirting! And Solomon says there is nothing new under the sun!"

Lady Cecil made a restless movement, and under the white fringe of her parasol her fair face flushed.

"Ginevra, I am sick—sick of having myself called that. And I am not a flirt, in your sense of the word. I don't lead

on men to gratify my own petty vanity, to swell the list of a vain, empty-headed, empty-hearted woman of the world's triumphs. I only like to have people like me—admire me, if you will; and when gentlemen are pleasant and dance well, and talk well, I can't be frigid and formal, and talk to them on stilts. It's they who are stupid—moths who will rush into the candle and singe their wings, do what you will. The warning is up, 'dangerous ground,' but they won't be warned. They think the quicksand that has let so many through will hold them. They are not content with being one's friend—they must be one's lover. And then when one is sorry, and says 'no,' they rush off to Spitzbergen, or Spanish America, or Central Africa, and one is called heartless, and a coquette. It's my misfortune, Ginevra, not my fault."

Again Ginevra laughed.

"My dear, what eloquence! Why weren't you lord, instead of Lady Cecil Clive?—you might take your seat in the House, and amaze that noble and prosy body by your brilliant oratory. Queenie, answer me this—truly now—were you ever in love in your life?"

Under the white fringe of that silken screen, her parasol once more that delicate carnation flushed all the fair "flower face" of *La Reine Blanche.* But she laughed.

"That is what lawyers call a leading question, isn't it, Ginevra? Who falls in love in these latter days? We talk of settlements, instead of turning periods to our lover's eyes; we go to St. George's, Hanover Square, if an eligible *parti* asks us to accompany him there; but as for getting up a *grande* passion—not to be thought of—bad style and obsolete. Somebody says in Coningsby, 'passions were not made for the drawing-room,' and I agree with that somebody. I don't mean to be cynical, Ginevra—I only state plain facts, and pity 'tis 'tis true."

Lady Chantilly's morning party was doubly pleasant for being about the last of the season, and Major Frankland *was* there. He was a tall, military swell, with heavy blonde mustache, sleepy, cat-like eyes, a drawl, and an eye-glass. It seemed the most natural thing imaginable that Lady Dangerfield should receive her Neapolitan ice from his hand, and that he should lean over her chair and whisper in her pretty pink ear while she ate it.

"We always return to our first loves, don't we, Lady Cecil?" laughed the Honorable Charles Delamer, of the F. O., eating

his ice, and taking his seat by the side of Lord Ruysland's daughter, "as faithful as the needle to the north star is old Frankland to the idol of his youth. Apropos of first loves, Lady Cecil," looking up artlessly, "whom do you suppose I met at her Majesty's last night?"

The Honorable Charles, one of the "fastest," most reckless young fellows about town, had two blue eyes as soft and innocent as the eyes of a month-old babe, though how Mr. Delamer preserved even the outward semblance of innocence at eight-and-twenty it would be difficult to say.

Lady Cecil laughed. She liked Charlie for this good reason, that he had never fallen in love with her.

"Not being a clairvoyant I cannot say. You must have met a great many people I should think. I know you never came near our box."

"No," Mr. Delamer said, "I did not visit your box. *He* wouldn't come."

"Who wouldn't come? Name this contumacious subject?"

"O'Donnell."

"Who?" suddenly and sharply she asked the question. "Who?"

"O'Donnell—Captain Redmond O'Donnell, of the Third Chasseurs d'Afrique—*Le Beau Chasseur*, as they call him—and the best fellow the sun shines on."

She was always pale as a lily—*La Reine Blanche*—was she really paler than usual now? Charlie Delamer wondered. Was it only the shadow of the white parasol, or—

There was a pause—only for a moment, but how long it seemed. Coote and Tinney's band discoursed sweet music, fountains flashed, birds sang, flowers bloomed, June sunshine steeped all in gold, and under the leafy branches Lady Dangerfield was strolling on the arm of Major Frankland.

Mr. Delamer, just a thought startled, spoke again.

"You know O'Donnell, don't you? In Ireland, was it? I think he said so last night."

"Yes—I know—I mean I knew Captain O'Donnell slightly once. It is over six years ago though—I should have thought he would have quite forgotten the circumstance by this time."

"Men who have been so fortunate as to know *La Reine Blanche* don't forget her so easily. Since you honor him by your remembrance, it is hardly strange if he recollects *you*."

"If I remember him!—Mr. Delamer, Redmond O'Donnell saved my life!"

"Saved your life! By Jove! the lucky fellow. But those dashing, long-sword, saddle-bridle Irishmen are always lucky. And the fellow said his acquaintance was but trifling."

Lady Cecil laughed—not quite so musically as usual.

"Trifling!" Perhaps Captain O'Donnell rated his service at the valuation of the thing saved! And he is in England. How curious. I fancied him—soldier of fortune—free lance that he is! for life out there in Algiers."

"He goes back shortly. He is a born fighter, and comes of a soldierly race. The O'Donnells have been soldiers of fortune for the last three hundred years, and asked no fairer fate. He leaves England soon, places his sister with some friends in France, and goes back."

"His sister!—the Rose, of whom he used to speak—of whom he was so fond?"

"Yes; I heard him call her Rose."

"You heard him! She is here then! And what is she like? Redmond O'Donnell's sister"—with a little laugh—"ought to be pretty."

"Well, she is not—at least not now. She appears to be under a cloud—sickness, trouble, something—didn't talk much—looks sad and somber, and is a brunette, with blue eyes. She is just from New Orleans—her brother went for her. I called there immediately before I came here, and O'Donnell dines with me this evening. What a prince of good fellows he was out yonder in Algiers, and the devil's own to fight. He won his way straight up from the ranks with his sword. And he saved your life! How was it, Lady Cecil?"

"Much too long a story for a morning party, with the thermometer at 90 degrees. There is Madame de Villafleur beckoning—is she not?"

"She is. Permit me, Lady Cecil." And taking Mr. Delamer's proffered arm, Lady Cecil sauntered over to Madame la Comtesse de Villafleur.

The rose light of the summer sunset was just merging into starry dusk, as the baronet's wife and earl's daughter drove back to Lowndes Square. Lady Dangerfield was in excellent spirits—evidently Major Frankland had been entertaining—and talked incessantly the way home; but Lady Cecil lay back among the barouche cushions, paler, graver, more silent than was her wont. She had been very much admired, as usual; she had held her court of adorers, also, as usual; but now that it was over, she looked wan, spiritless, and bored.

"And he is in England—in London!" she was thinking "He was at the opera last night, and saw me! And it was not worth while renewing so slight an acquaintance! To think—to think"—she set her pearly teeth hard—"to think that after all those years I should not yet have outlived that sentimental folly of so long ago!"

How stupid you are, Queenie!" her cousin said, pettishly, as they neared home. "I believe you have not spoken two words since we left Kew; and now that I have asked you twice if you saw Chandos Howard playing lawn billiards with Lady Charlotte Lansing, you only answer, 'Yes dear, very pretty indeed!' It is to be hoped you will recover the use of your tongue and your senses before you appear at Carlton Terrace to-night."

With which reproach Lady Dangerfield got out and went up the steps of her own aristocratic mansion.

Soames, the footman, flung open the drawing-room door, but Lady Cecil did not enter. She toiled wearily up to her own apartment, threw off her bonnet and scarf, as if even their weight oppressed her, and crossing to the gold-and-ebony writing desk, unlocked it, and took out her treasured relics once more.

"I do not need *you* to remind me of my folly any longer," she said, looking at them. "I will do now what I should have done this morning."

The faintly sighing evening wind fluttered the lace curtains of the open window. She walked to it, gazed for a moment at the pictured face, set her lips, and deliberately tore up into minutest fragments the note and the picture. The summer breeze whirled them off in an instant, the spray of clematis, and the dark curl of hair followed, and then Lady Cecil rang for her maid, and dressed for the evening.

"They say—those wiseacres who make books—that every life has its romance. I suppose they are right, and so forever has ended mine. Not the white satin to-night, Desirée—the blue silk and turquoise ornaments, I think!"

At half-past eleven that night—and when had the phenomenon occurred before?—the Earl of Ruysland returned to his niece's house. He had written and dispatched his letter, and though Lady Cecil had sent no message to Sir Arthur Tregenna, the letter contained a most encouraging and flattering one. He had dined at his club, he had indulged in chicken hazard for an hour, and at half-past eleven stood in the moon

light at Lady Dangerfield's door. He had been up, as you know, until half-past five the preceding day, and on the wintry side of fifty late hours and dissipation tell.

"I think I will give up London life," he said to himself, "and devote myself to growing old gracefully. Let me accomplish this marriage, pay my debts, and with replenished coffers, and a rejuvenated reputation, betake myself to pleasant Continental Spas and Badens, and live happy forever after. Ah, Soames! my lady and Lady Cecil departed yet for the ball?"

"Not yet, me lord—dressing, me lord—carriage has just been ordered round, me lord."

Lord Ruysland ascended to the silent magnificence of the long drawing-rooms. There were three, opening one into the other, in a brilliant vista of velvet carpet, lace draperies, ormolu, and satin upholstery. They were deserted now, and the gas unlit. The range of windows, seven in number, stood wide open, and the silvery light of the resplendent June moon poured in.

"Silence and solitude," muttered the earl; "why the deuce are they all in the dark? Aw! very pretty, indeed, brilliant moon, and a cloudless sky—one might fancy it Venice instead of smoky, foggy, dingy London."

He paused. The rooms were not deserted, it would seem, after all. Out of the lace and amber curtains of the seventh and farthest window, a figure emerged and approached him. The earl's eyes turned from that crystal moon, and fixed expectantly on the advancing figure—the figure of a woman. Who was it? Not a servant, surely, with that slow and stately tread, that assured air. Not little Lady Dangerfield—this figure was tall; not Lady Cecil either—even she must have stood a full head shorter than this woman. Who was it?

The long drawing-room lay in alternate strips of darkness and light. The shadows hid her for a moment, she emerged into the moonrays again, and again disappeared. Who was she—this tall, magnificently proportioned woman, in dark sweeping drapery, with that majestic stateliness of mien and walk?

She had not seen him. For the fourth time she came into the light, then the darkness took her—a fifth time she appeared, a sixth, and then she beheld the earl standing curious, expectant, watching.

She stopped short—the moonlight fell full upon her face—pale and calm. And the Earl of Ruysland, who for the last thirty

years had outlived every phase of human emotion, uttered a low, worldless cry, and fell slowly back. The sound of that startled cry, low as it was, reached her ear. The woman in the moonlight came a step nearer and spoke:

"I beg your pardon. I should not have intruded, but I thought these rooms were quite deserted."

What a sweet voice it was! Its tones lingered pleasantly on the ear, like the low notes of a flute.

Her words broke the spell that held the earl. His eyes had been fixed with a sort of fascination on her face—a look of startled wonder on his own. And Raoul, Earl of Ruysland, was not easily startled. He drew a long breath and stood aside to let her pass.

"It is I who should apologize," he said, with the courtly deference to all women that long habit had made second nature, "for startling you in so absurd a manner. I labored under the same delusion as yourself. I fancied these rooms forsaken. Soames! lights immediately!"

The tall footman set the chandeliers ablaze, and closed the curtains. But the dark-draped lady had vanished.

"Who was that?" the earl asked carelessly; "a visitor!"

"The gov'ness, me lord. Me lady's new nuss'ry gov'ness. Came two hours ago, me lord, which her name it's Miss 'Erncastle."

"Is the carriage waiting, Soames?" inquired my lady, sailing in a sea of green silk and tulle illusion, illuminated with emeralds. "You, Uncle Raoul; and at half-past seven! What miracle will happen next? You don't mean to say you are coming with Cecil and me to the Duchess of Stratheam's *soirée musicale?*"

"I don't, indeed. Nothing is further from my thoughts than *soirées musicales.* Ginevra, who is that new governess of yours? She is your governess, Soames tells me."

"What! Miss Herncastle! where did you see her?"

"I saw her just now, as I came in. She's a very distinguished-looking person, isn't she? Nursery governesses don't usually look like tragedy queens, do they? She has a very remarkable face."

"Has she? You are as enthusiastic as Queenie. She saw her at noon, and raved about her for half an hour. I must be very blind or stupid—I confess I can only see a preposterously tall young woman, with a pale, solemn face."

"Enthusiastic, am I?" Lord Ruysland repeated. "I wasn't

aware that I was; but I once knew another face very like it—wonderfully like it. And I give you my word of honor that as I came upon Miss—ah, to be sure—Herncastle, standing there in the moonlight, I thought I saw a ghost."

---

## CHAPTER III.

### SIR ARTHUR TREGENNA.

FAR away, along the north coast of Cornwall, not far from "the thundering shores of Bude and Boss," there stands a huge pile of masonry, looking old enough and hoary enough to have been built by the hands of the Druids, and called Tregenna Towers. Its lofty battlemented circular towers pierced the blue air at a dizzy height—its beacon a land-mark fifteen miles up and down the coast. From its sea wall you look sheer down three hundred feet of black and slaty cliffs into the white surging sea below. And to the right, three miles off, lying in a warm, green hollow, is Tregenna village, with its ivied church and vicarage, its clusters of stone cottages, with roses, myrtle, and fuchsias blooming out-of-doors the year round. Gray, lonely, weather-beaten Tregenna Towers stands, with the steady sea gale howling around it, miles of foam-white sea, and a low, dusk, fast-drifting sky over all. Right and left as far as you can see, and farther, spread moors, and mines, and fisheries, all claiming for their lord Sir Arthur Tregenna, twelfth baronet of his line, and one of the very wealthiest in the United Kingdom. You may wander on for miles over those purple ridgy moors. You may ask the brown fishermen or the black miners wherever you meet them, and the answer will still be the same—Sir Arthur Tregenna is lord of all.

Only once in seven long years has the master's footstep rung through the gray, lonesome rooms of Tregenna. He is a wanderer over the earth from the North Sea to Oceanica. Since his father's death, ten years before, when he was three-and-twenty, Tregenna has seen but little of him—England, either, for that matter. And still with loving fidelity the old servants, the old tenants and retainers look forward to the day

when Sir Arthur will bring a bride to old Tregenna, and renew its ancient splendors. For they love him very dearly. The gentlest of masters, the most Christian of gentlemen, the kindest of landlords—that is what they will tell you of him. He might have been one of good King Arthur's knights, so stainless a record, so high a code of honor, so unblemished a life lay behind him. He had loved his father with a rare and great love, and upon that father's death had gone abroad, and been an exile and a wanderer since.

On the second day of July, among the passengers who arrived at the London bridge terminus, straight from Tasmania, was Arthur Tregenna. His luggage was scant, there was nothing about him to betoken the owner of fabulous wealth, and he drove at once to a certain old-fashioned West End hotel, that his family had used for generations. He dined, dressed, and drove to Lowndes Square. But the shutters of that aristocratic mansion were closed, the furniture gone into Holland shrouds, and an old woman in pattens, who opened the door, informed him that the family had left only that very morning, for Sussex.

"Then there is nothing for it but to follow," Sir Arthur thought. "It is due to *her*—to my promise. I shall go down to-morrow."

He went back to his hotel in the silvery summer dusk. London seemed new to him after years of wandering through Canadian wildernesses, Mexican tropics, Indian jungles and American prairies; its roaring, surging, ceaseless Babel stunned him. He sat in an arm-chair near the open window, the last pink flush of the dying day upon him, and a thoughtful gravity habitual to it lying upon his face.

He was a very tall, very fair man, this Cornish baronet, with deep set gray eyes, close-cropped blonde hair, blonde whiskers, and—not handsome. The face of a sunburnt student, perhaps, never that of a handsome man—a face that could set itself stern as death, a face at once proud and grave, but a face that men might trust and woman love, for all that. A face that lit into wonderful warmth and geniality when he smiled, but Sir Arthur Tregenna did not smile often.

The thoughtful gravity of his face was a shade graver even than usual this soft summer evening as he sat here alone. His eyes looked wearily over the surging sea of strange faces, with something of a tired, lonely light.

"Nine-and-twenty," he was thinking, "and I feel as alone in England this first day of my return as though I had never set

foot in it before. It is time I gave up this Bedouin sort of life, this wandering, gipsyish, vagabond kind of existence and *ranger*, as our lively French neighbors phrase it, and settle down to civilized life. And yet—I don't know—the normal life suits me after all, and I may be glad to return to it. If I find her as I half expect to find her, I most assuredly shall. A London coquette is no wife for a plain, practical man like me. And I want a wife, not a butterfly.

"'Who would live with a doll, though its hair should be dressed
And its petticoats trimmed in the fashion?'

"A London belle of three years' standing and a flirt—no such woman as that is hardly likely to be a wife of mine or mistress of Tregenna. But it was my father's wish that at least I should marry no one before seeing her, and every wish of his is sacred. It is surprising, though, that she remains single still—with all that beauty and grace and fatal witchery they say she possesses. Many men have offered, but she has refused all—men with rank and power and wealth."

For Sir Arthur had returned home on most matrimonial thoughts intent. His late father and the present Earl of Ruysland, dissimilar in many things, were yet close friends and comrades. The plain Cornish baronet had been dazzled by the more brilliant peer, and when that peer fell into poverty, his purse and sympathy were ever at his service. And one having an only son, the other an only daughter, what more natural than that they should sink their bond of friendship in the closer bond of relationship.

Old Sir John had loved and admired little Lady Cecil, next to his boy, above all earthly things. Her fair face and golden ringlets, and brown, luminous eyes made sunshine often in the dim, dusky-storied old rooms of Tregenna, her clear girl's tones, the sweetest music. She had not met young Arthur on these visits, he had been up at Oxford. Casually, however, once or twice they had come together. But somehow the friendship of the fathers was not reproduced in the children. Little Lady Cecil in her white frocks and blue sashes, her flowing curls, and dancing eyes, was but a frivolous, tiresome child in the pedantic gaze of the tall, Greek-speaking, Latin-loving under-grad; while this uplifted, severe, silent young Oxonian was an object of awe and terror to the earl's daughter. But Sir John died, and on his death-bed he had asked his son, stricken with grief, to make, if

he could win her consent, Lady Cecil Clive the future mistress of Tregenna.

"You will love her," the old man had said; "who could help it? She is as beautiful as the day, and as good as she is beautiful. No one lives whom I would as soon see your wife as my old friend's child."

Arthur had given his promise, and when did a Tregenna ever break his word to a friend or foe? He went abroad then, and for three years remained abroad. Lady Cecil was in her nineteenth year upon his return, and it was her first season, death in the family having kept her back. They met in that gay, gracious, brilliant, Mayfair world, and he began to realize that Lady Cecil Clive was by no means the woman of women he wished to take to wife.

She was lovely—no doubt of that—sweet, gentle, pure, and proud. But she loved admiration—many men sought her, pressed forward eagerly in the chase, and Sir Arthur Tregenna stood in the background and saw her smile upon them all; very few of those smiles were for him. She had heard nothing of that death-bed compact, and her father chanced to be absent from England that first season. Before it had ended Sir Arthur had manned his yacht, and set out for the Mediterranean.

And now after three years he was back, and on the same errand. One last effort he would make to obey his father; if he found her the sort of woman he half suspected, then she should never be wife of his.

Two men were talking near him as he sat lost in thought. Their conversation fell on his ear—they did not seem to heed him—and lost in his own reverie he did not comprehend a word.

"Left this morning, did you say, Wyatt?" one of them was saying. "Somewhere down in Sussex, is it? Then I shall not go to the Clarges Street reception to-night. London is a howling wilderness without her. The sun shines on nothing half so lovely as *La Reine Blanche*."

"So poor Buccleth used to say until she refused, and sent him headlong to perdition. It's a curious fact in natural philosophy that all the men who lose their heads for the White Queen go straight to the bad after it. Poor she is as a church mouse, and yet I believe she has rejected more proposals this season than the Duke of Belviour's daughter herself, with her beauty, her blood, and her splendid *dot*. What do you suppose she is waiting for—a ducal coronet?"

"Old Ruys is an inscrutable card, and there's some one in the background, depend upon it. Wasn't there a whisper at Pratt's of an enormously rich Cornishman for whom the old bird is reserving her. She is charming—*La Reine Blanche*—and nothing under thirty thousand a year stands any chance there.

"'Praise as we may when the tale is done,
She is but a maid to be wooed and won.'"

"I envy the Cornishman, whoever he is."

"His name is Tregenna—Sir Arthur Tregenna—worth no end in tin mines and fisheries and that, but a deuce of a prig, so I am told."

The next instant the two young dandies were startled by the tall, sunburned, silent gentleman in the arm-chair rising up and facing them.

"I beg your pardon," he said in haughty surprise; "I am that deuce of a prig—Sir Arthur Tregenna. Had I known I was the subject of your conversation I would have interrupted you sooner. And you scarcely honor the name of the lady you praise by making it the public property of a coffee-room."

With which, and a frown of haughty anger, the tall, tanned gentleman stalked away, leaving the two friends aghast.

"Gad!" Wyatt said; "and that's Tregenna—like a rencontre on the stage where the hero, supposed to be at the antipodes, turns up at a minute's notice. I took him to be a sailor, merchant captain, or something of that sort. Has his arrival, I wonder, anything to do with the little Clive's flight from London?"

More and more dissatisfied, the young baronet left the room and the hotel.

And this was the girl he had come home to marry—a flirt who drew men only to refuse them and send them to perdition, as that perfumed puppy in the coffee-room phrased it—a fair and fatal Circe, born to work evil and destruction on earth.

"I shall go down and see for myself," he thought, sternly; "that at least my promise binds me to, but no hardened coquette shall ever be wife of mine. If I find Lady Cecil Clive what I know I shall, I will leave England again within a week, and try once more the plains of Texas, the buffalo, and the Indians. I will take some dusky woman; she shall rear my savage brood. Well, not quite so bad as that, perhaps—I'm not in love, and the fellow in Locksley Hall was—but I'll go to my grave alone, and Tregenna shall pass to the next-of-kin,

sooner than marry a woman of the world who *is* a woman of the world and no more. How lightly these flippant fops took her name on their lips. And my poor father believed her an angel because she had an angel face. It's enough to make a man forswear the sex."

---

## CHAPTER IV.

### AT SCARSWOOD.

LATE in the afternoon of that sunny June day, at the very hour indeed in which Sir Arthur Tregenna sat listening to Wyatt and his companion in the coffee-room of his hotel, Lady Dangerfield, her uncle, cousin, governess, servants, etc.—an imposing procession—arrived from London at Scarswood Park.

Scarswood! With the rose flush of the setting sun upon it, with the glades, the lawns, the shrubberies steeped in gold, with the stone urns on the stone terraces turned to burnished silver, the scarlet roses like sparks of fire, every leaf of the copper beeches blood-red rubies, the windows glancing through the trees like sheets of burnished gold, Scarswood Park and the turreted old mansion came upon them—a marvelously fair picture. Trackless depths of fern waved away and away, the great fish-pond spread out like a silver mirror. Landscape gardeners under my lady's orders had done their work: the parterres, the tropic bloom, the wealth of myrtle and mignonette, of roses and geraniums, were like unto some modern garden of Eden.

"How lovely—what a magnificent old place!" Lady Cecil exclaimed; "and you call it dull as death, as dismal as a tomb, Ginevra!"

It was her first visit to the ancestral home of her cousin's rich husband, and in her heart of hearts the belle of London dearly loved the country.

Lady Dangerfield glanced around her with a little sour air.

"So it was, so it is, so it will be—if I let it. Why can't the London season last forever? I like rural life and rustic scenes in pictures—in real life give me Belgravia, year in year out."

"And balls, soirées, operas, drawing-rooms, and drives—the old, weary, treadmill, tiresome, endless round. You are fearfully and wonderfully vital, Ginevra, and stand the wear and tear well; but if these little breathing spaces did not come even *you* would have to go under speedily. For myself six weeks of London, if you will, four of Paris, and the rest of the year in just such a dear old country house as this, half a dozen nice people to live with, one's country neighbors to visit, and Mrs. Grundy forgotten."

"Well, my dear, you shall have all that and more, when you are Lady Tregenna. Tregenna Towers is as old again as Scarswood, and twice as truly rural. Is that my lord and master I see on the portico steps? Really he shrivels up and grows smaller with every passing day! And here come Pearl and Pansy flying down the steps like little wild Indians. Miss Herncastle, what do *you* think of your future home and your future pupils?"

The governess, in charge of my lady's fat King Charles, had taken the third seat in the carriage. The earl had not driven with the ladies from the station. Miss Herncastle's large calm eyes had been taking in everything, and Miss Herncastle's calm tones replied:

"It is a beautiful place, my lady. But I have seen Scarswood before."

"Indeed! This is not your first visit to Sussex, then? Was it in Sir Peter's time, or before? Pansy—Pearl! Little wretches, do you want to run under the carriage wheels? Stand back and be still! Sir Peter, how stupid of you to let those children run wild in this boisterous manner!"

It was my lady's first greeting to her husband as she was assisted out. Sir Peter had come down the steps to meet her; she gave him two gloved fingers, then gave the twins first a shake, then a kiss. The little nine-year-olds were miniatures of herself—the same round, black eyes, the same crisp, black hair, the same petite features and proportions, and so much, also, like one another that it seemed impossible at first glance to tell them apart.

"You disobedient little midgets!" their mamma said, "how often have I told you not to rush to meet any one in that hoydenish way? What is your maid thinking of to let you?"

"'Twasn't Susan's fault, mamma," piped one black-eyed twin. "She told me to stay in the nursery, but me and Pansy saw the carriage, and you and Auntie Cecil, from the window, and we

couldn't stay. We're awful glad you've come, Auntie Our dolls haven't got a summer dress to their backs."

Lady Cecil laughed and kissed the twins. Children always fell in love with her at sight.

"Not a summer dress to their backs, Pearl, and the season so far advanced! A harrowing case, which must be attended to immediately. Sir Peter, will you indorse Pearl's welcome, and say you are glad to see me likewise?"

She gave him her hand with a smile that thawed even the frozen nature of Sir Peter Dangerfield. To be glad to see any one who was a visitor and daily expense was not in his nature, but as such things had to be under the rule of his very much better half, he shook Lady Cecil's delicate gray glove, and said something about his pleasure in welcoming her to Scarswood.

"And Scarswood is a home to be proud of," Lady Cecil said —"my idea of an earthly paradise, as I told Ginevra coming up. Papa stayed behind, Sir Peter, talking to a friend—he will be here for dinner. Permit me—Miss Herncastle, Sir Peter. Ah, Pansy! ah, Pearl! No more dolls and dress-making. Here is a lady come all the way from London to train you in the way you should go."

The twins fixed four big, bright, black eyes full on the new governess. Sir Peter bowed—the governess was at some little distance—then stopped, put up his eye-glass, and stared again. The governess came a step nearer, fixed her eyes upon his face, made a graceful obeisance, and turned to her pupils.

"Will you give me a kiss, my dear? You are Pansy, are you not?—you Pearl? Ah! I thought I could tell the difference, though you are so much alike."

"I trust, Sir Peter, you saw that the upholsterers fitted up the drawing and dining-rooms according to my orders? Have the pictures ar—" She stopped short. "Good gracious, Queenie! what is that man staring at? Sir Peter!"

He never heard her. His eyes behind his double eye-glass were fixed upon Miss Herncastle: his face had turned to a dull yellow pallor from brow to chin. His wife stood and stared at him aghast.

"For Heaven's sake, look at him, Queenie! Is he going to have a fit, or—Sir Peter Dangerfield, what on earth are you agape at?"

She caught his arm impatiently, and gave him no gentle shake.

"He's staring at you, Miss Herncastle *What* is the matter with him?"

Miss Herncastle turned calmly from the children, and again looked at the baronet.

"He certainly looks very ill. Is there anything I can do?"

"Her voice!" the baronet said, in a horror-struck whisper; 'her eyes, her face! Oh, Heaven! who is this?"

"Who?" his wife cried, with a second angry shake. "Are you mad? Whom are you looking at? What do you mean? *Who?*"

"That woman—that girl! Who is she?"

"Miss Herncastle, the children's governess, you little idiot!" Lady Dangerfield actually called that noble baronet a "little idiot," and gave him a second shake into the bargain. "What is there about her to frighten you into fits, I should like to know?"

"Miss Herncastle, the governess," he muttered, falling back; "and for one moment—I thought—I could have sworn it was—it was—"

"Well—whom?"

"One dead and buried for six long years."

He turned his back upon her abruptly, and with that ghastly answer walked into the house.

My lady turned angrily upon her new governess.

"Really, Miss Herncastle," she began, haughtily, "this is very extraordinary, I must say. The Earl of Ruysland sees you last night in the moonlight and takes you for a ghost, Sir Peter Dangerfield sees you to-day in the sunshine, and takes you for another. Who are you, pray?"

The faintest symptom of an amused smile dawned on the tranquil face of the tall nursery governess.

"I am Helen Herncastle, my lady, and the ghost of no one that I know of."

Lady Cecil laughed outright—her sweet, mellow laugh.

"How absurd you are, Ginevra. Ghost, indeed! Only evil consciences see ghosts, and Miss Herncastle is much too substantial for ghost or fairy. She resembles some one Sir Peter has once known—dead six years he said. Was there not a cousin—a young lady who died suddenly—an—"

"Impostor," said Lady Dangerfield. "Yes, there was—I dare say it is she! It's not Miss Herncastle's fault, I suppose, that she must resemble dead people, but it's very extraordinary and very unpleasant. My nerves have received a shock they will not recover from for a week. I hate scenes!"

And then, with a last backward, distrustful glance at the governess, my lady swept away upstairs in very bad temper indeed

But bad temper had years ago become a chronic complaint of Lady Dangerfield's. The world had gone wrong with her in the days of love's young dream, and soured the milk of human kindness within her for all time. It was not Miss Herncastle's fault, perhaps, that people should mistake her at first sight for a ghost, still it was vexatious and exasperating, and if her nerves were to be unstrung in this manner, it would perhaps have been better to have paid a higher price for a commonplace person, who would not startle earls and baronets into mistaking her for the spirit of their loved ones gone.

Lady Cecil lingered for a moment behind. She laid her slender gloved hand on the arm of the governess, and looked into her face with that rarely sweet smile that had driven so many men fathoms deep in love.

"You will not mind Lady Dangerfield, Miss Herncastle? she is nervous and easily irritated; she has had a great deal of trouble in her life-time, and little things annoy her. These momentary irritations pass with her as quickly as they come. Do not let them annoy you."

Sweet and gracious words, spoken with sweet and gracious meaning. Miss Herncastle, still standing with Bijou humbly in her arms, looked up and their eyes met, the eyes of the working-woman and the delicate, high-bred patrician. What was in the gaze of these steady gray eyes that made Lady Cecil recoil a step? What in the expression of the quiet face that made her remove her hand hastily and shrink away? She could never have told; the eyes were calm, the face emotionless, and yet—

"You are very kind, my lady. I am not annoyed—I have no right to be. People in my position are not apt to be too sensitive, still I thank you very much."

Lady Cecil bent her head, caught up her gray silk skirts and swept away.

"Whoever Miss Herncastle is, I think she must have seen what they call better days. She is a lady evidently, in spite of her position. She attracts me and repels me at once. They are handsome eyes, but how coldly, how hardly they look at you. A striking face, the face of a clever woman, and yet I can't like it. Something in the look she gave me just now made my flesh creep, and she doesn't resemble any dead person ever *I* knew. Papa took her for a ghost, and Sir Peter, too. How very odd."

Perhaps she would have thought it yet more odd could she have seen Sir Peter still lingering farther down the entrance

hall, screened by a porphyry case taller than himself, and watching the governess, as one of the servants conducted her to her chamber. Still more odd, could she have seen him follow, as though drawn by some irresistible fascination, up along corridors and galleries, until he stood in the passage leading to the nursery, and the rooms of the governess and children.

While he stood irresolute, hardly knowing what he wanted or why he had come, the nursery door opened, one of the twins came bouncing out, and ran headlong against him in the evening twilight of the hall.

"Don't scream, Pansy—it's I." Sir Peter clapped his hand over her mouth. "I only came up here to—to—Pansy, where's the governess?"

Pansy pointed to the nursery door, with wide eyes of wonder.

"What is she doing?"

"Looking out of the window and looking grumpy. I hate grumpy governesses. I hate Miss Herncastle. Why didn't mamma fetch us a governess like Aunt Cecil. *She's* nice. She plays blind man's buff with us, and battledore. I hate poky people. So does Pearl. Miss Herncastle's poky, and solemn, and stiff. Papa Peter, do you want her? I'll tell her."

"Oh! no, I don't want her—you mustn't tell her. I—I'm going down again. Don't say anything about my being up here, Pansy—there's a good girl."

He turned in a nervous, irresolute manner—a manner that had become habitual to him of late years—and groped his way downstairs. Six years had passed since that tragic day, when he had looked upon Katherine Dangerfield's dead face, and those six years had made him an old man. Remorse, terror, nerves, dyspepsia, be it what it might—the fact remained: Sir Peter Dangerfield, at six-and-thirty, was an old man. He was one of your fleshless, sallow people, who naturally age fast, and since his marriage the change for the worse had been twice as apparent as before. His pale, sunken eyes looked paler and dimmer than ever, he walked with a habitual stoop, he shut himself up with dry-as-dust books, and insects and fossils, and had little to say to anybody.

The resident gentry of the neighborhood had instinctively shunned him since his accession to Scarswood. Strangers looked with a sort of contemptuous pity at the dried-up, shriveled, pitiful master of this grand domain, and he shrank away from those humiliating glances with morbid pride. The desire

of his heart was his—Katherine Dangerfield was in her grave—he had had his revenge and his triumph—*but* never in the days of his most abject poverty had he been half so miserable as now.

Of Mrs. Vavasor he had never heard since that night upon which he had paid her price, and they had parted. In Paris or Baden, doubtless under some new *nom-de-fantasia*, she was enjoying herself after her own fashion upon the proceeds of her plotting.

Of all the actors in that dark tragedy of Scarswood, only himself remained. Mr. Henry Otis shortly after removed to London with all his belongings, and with Gaston Dantree. "Katherine Dangerfield left him in my charge," the young assistant said. "In my charge he remains until he is able to take care of himself."

Whether or no that time had ever come, Sir Peter had never discovered. Mr. Otis had never returned to Castleford, and it was a subject he was chary of mentioning, or thinking of even. It came to him in dreams—bad, disturbing dreams, engendered partly by an evil conscience, partly by heavy English dinners. In his waking hours the aim of his life was to banish it. And lo! in one of the hours when he had most succeeded, a woman, a stranger, stood before him, like—horribly, unnaturally like—Katherine Dangerfield.

"*Living*, I will pursue you to the end of the earth. *Dead*, I will return, if the dead can!"

He had never forgotten those words—words only spoken in a girl's impotent passion, in her knowledge of the cowardly and superstitious nature she had to deal with. Words that were but a weak woman's meaningless threat, but which from the hour he had looked upon her dead face had returned to him with ghastly force.

Would Miss Herncastle be at dinner?

That was the one thought uppermost in his mind as he made his own toilet. He kept no valet or body-servant of any kind. Valets were expensive, thievish, and prying. None of the tribe should spy upon him, and help devour his substance. My lady was enormously extravagant. Retrenchment must begin somewhere.

Rich with silver, sparkling with crystal, white with linen, gay with flowers, the round dinner-table looked a picture as he came in. Through the long French window, open to the lawn, the perfume of my lady's rose garden, the magnolias, and

clematis came. A silver gray mist lay over the park, a faint, new moon glimmered up in the blue, a nightingale sang its plaintive vesper chant in the green gloom of the trees, and far off the shine of the summer stars lay upon the sea. And within the gas was lit in all the crystal globes and silver branches, and my lady, dressed in one of Worth's most ravishing masterpieces, though there were no gentlemen to admire but her uncle and husband, looked a fit goddess to preside at the feast. Lord Ruysland, bland, urbane, suave, smooth, was faultlessly attired, and with a rose in his button-hole. Lady Cecil, in gold-brown silk the hue of her eyes, was also there; but not Miss Herncastle. He drew a long breath of relief.

"I might have known it," he muttered. "My lady isn't the one to dine with her nursery governess, company or no company. I shall see very little of her, that's evident, and I'm glad of it. What the devil does the woman mean looking like —like—?"

He did not care to speak the name even to himself; but ignore them as we may, there are things that will not be forgotten. This was one. Miss Herncastle was not present at the dinner-table, but the phantom face of the dead *was*. In spirit Katherine Dangerfield was at his elbow, and he ate and drank like a man in a gloomy dream.

"You're not looking well, my dear Dangerfield," my Lord of Ruysland said. "You positively are not. You lose flesh, you lose spirits, you lose appetite. It is evident that the air of Scarswood does not agree with you. Take my advice, and go abroad."

His lordship was right. The air of Scarswood did *not* agree with Sir Peter Dangerfield, and never would.

"Go to Germany, and try the mineral waters. Change of scene and tonics are what you want. By all means, Dangerfield, go abroad and try the waters. Beastly stuff, I admit, but of use, sir—of use."

He needed waters certainly—the waters of Lethe—had that fabled river existed in Germany. He was almost entirely silent at dinner—silent still "across the walnuts and the wine," but in the drawing room, after dinner, he suddenly found his tongue. His wife was practising some new music sent her by Major Frankland, whose one weakness it was to fancy himself a modern Mozart, and bore his friends to death with his own compositions. Lord Ruysland had composed himself for a comfortable slumber in a sleepy, hollow arm-chair, and Lady

Cecil, pensive and pale, stood gazing out at the luminous starry dusk, listening to the nightingale's song, to the call of the deer in the park, to the soft summer murmur of the trees.

"Lady Cecil, is Miss Herncastle's hair brown or black?"

From her waking dream, a sharp piping voice at her elbow asking this abrupt question, aroused her. She glanced round, glanced down, for she was the taller of the two, and saw the pinched, yellow face of little Sir Peter.

Now, Lady Cecil, out of the greatness of a generous heart, had an infinite pity for all inferior, all persecuted, all long-suffering things. And she pitied Sir Peter greatly. His wife treated him with about half a quarter the respect and affection she felt for Bijou, and would have bewailed the death of the dog much the deeper of the two. He looked sickly and miserable: he had no friends, no companions; he was, in her eyes, a poor, little, imposed-upon, persecuted martyr. Some instinct told him she was his friend, and in his trouble he came to her now. She would not laugh at him, she would not repeat what he said, and he must confide in some one or die.

"My dear Sir Peter, how you startled me! I was thousands of miles away, I believe, when you spoke. What did you say? Miss Herncastle—what?"

"I asked you if Miss Herncastle had long, light-brown hair?"

A curious question surely. Lady Cecil's soft, fawn-colored eyes opened a little.

"For its length, I cannot answer. Who can tell who has long or short hair in these days of chignons and false tresses. Of the color I can't speak positively. It is black—jet black."

"Black!" he gave a great gasp of relief. "You are sure, Lady Cecil?"

"Certain, Sir Peter. And her eyebows and eyelashes are of the same dense darkness."

"And her eyes, Lady Cecil—are they gray?"

"Still harping on my daughter!" laughed *La Reine Blanche.* "Yes, Sir Peter, they are gray—very dark—very large—very fine. You appear to take a most extraordinary interest in Ginevra's new governess, certainly. Resembles, doubtless, some one you have known?"

"Resembles! that is not the word for it. I tell you, Lady Cecil"—in a voice of deep suppressed intensity—"it is the same face, the same—the same. Older, graver, deeper, changed in some things—but the same. The face of Katherine Dangerfield!"

The name had not passed his lips for years. His eyes had a glitter, his whole face an excitement, his voice an intensity she had never heard before. She drew back from him a little, yet curious and interested too.

"Katherine Dangerfield. Yes, I have heard her story. It was in the papers years ago, and Ginevra told me of her at the time of her marriage. A very sad story—a very sad fate. She lost all—fortune, name, father, and her affianced husband, on her wedding day. And a week after she died. It is the saddest story, I think I ever heard. What a dastard, what a cowardly dastard that man must have been. What became of him, Sir Peter?'

"I don't know, I have never asked—I never cared. *I* was not to blame—no one has a right to blame me—I only took what was lawfully my own—she had no shadow of right to Scarswood. How could I tell she would die? Other women lose their fathers, their husbands, their fortunes, and live on. How did I know it would kill her? I say again," his voice rising shrill, and high, and angry, "no one has a right to blame *me!*"

"And no one does blame you, Sir Peter. Why should they? Of course you could not foretell she would die. The only one to blame was that wretch who deserted her. She was ready to give up everything for him—to take him, poor and obscure as he was, and love him, and give him all, and in the hour of her ruin he deserted her. Oh, it was a shame—a shame! And Ginevra's governess really resembles this poor dead young lady so strongly?"

"It is horrible, I tell you—horrible! I thought I saw a ghost when she rose up before me three hours ago. Lady Cecil, do you believe in ghosts?"

He asked the question abruptly, and with perfect gravity. Lady Cecil laughed.

"Believe in ghosts! My dear Sir Peter, who does believe in ghosts in the nineteenth century? I fancy the ghosts of Banquo and Hamlet's father are the only ghosts ever seen in England now. Like the fairies, they crossed to Germany centuries ago."

"Have you read Scott's '*Demonology*' and Mrs. Crowe's '*Night Side of Nature*,' Lady Cecil?"

"And Mrs. Radcliffe's raw-head-and-bloody-bone romances? Oh, yes, Sir Peter, I have gone through them all."

"And still you don't believe?"

"And still I don't believe. When I see a ghost *bonâ fide* and in—no, out of the flesh, I shall yield; not sooner. But why do you ask? Surely, Sir Peter, *you* don't believe in anything so absurd?"

"Who can vouch for its absurdity? Lady Cecil, yes—I do believe that the spirits of the dead return."

Lady Cecil looked at him, half-laughing, half-dismayed, and gave a little feminine shiver.

"Good gracious! how German you grow. This comes of living alone, with blinded eyesight 'poring over miserable books,' as Tennyson says. Now, Sir Peter, I am skeptical. I want proof. But I am open to conviction. Did you ever see a ghost? That is what alchemists call a 'crucial test.' In the dead waste and middle of the night do spirits from the vasty deep come to make darkness hideous?"

"You laugh, Lady Cecil," he said, hoarsely. "In the vulgar superstition no ghost in shroud ever came to my bedside, but there are other ways of being haunted. There are dreams—horrible, awful dreams, that come night after night, the same thing over and over, and from which you start up with the cold sweat on your brow and the damp of death in your hair—visions that come to you in your sleep from the infernal regions, I believe, more ghastly than any waking vision. Over and over, and ever the same—what do you call that, Lady Cecil?"

"Hot suppers, Sir Peter, and heavy dinners. Any skillful physician will exorcise your dreaming apparitions."

"And a few miles from here there is a house, Bracken Hollow it is called, which no one, not the bravest in the parish, is willing to pass after nightfall. A house in which a murder once was done, where unearthly sights are seen at unearthly hours, and unearthly sounds heard. What do you say to that?"

"That it's a very common story, indeed. Why even at papa's place, down in Hants, Clive Court, popular rumor says there is a ghost. An Earl of Ruysland, who committed suicide two hundred years ago, stalks about yet in the twilight, gory and grim. That is the legend, *but* no living mortal has ever seen him. If he walks, as they say, he takes good care to keep out of sight. There are haunted houses in every county in England. No fine old family would be complete without its family ghost."

"You don't believe what you say, Lady Cecil. I tell you I have heard the sounds at Bracken Hollow myself."

"Indeed!" but still Lady Cecil smiled skeptically: "a *real*

*bona fide* haunted house! What a charming neighborhood. Now the one ungratified ambition of my life is to see a disembodied spirit—to hear it, if it is inclined to make noise. Before I am a week older I shall pay—what was it?—Bracken Hollow—a visit. Bracken Hollow! it has a ghostly and mysterious sound. Has the ghost full possession of the premises, or is Bracken Hollow shared by some less ethereal tenant?"

"An old woman lives there. She was Katherine Dangerfield's nurse—Old Hannah."

"Then I shall pay Old Hannah a visit, and investigate. I shall positively, Sir Peter. Excuse me, Ginevra is calling—I suppose she wants me to help her with that tiresome sonata."

She walked away, leaving Sir Peter gloomily by the window alone.

"I have heard of monomaniacs—sane on all things save one—mad on that," she thought. "I believe Sir Peter is a monomaniac on the subject of ghosts."

Perhaps Lady Cecil was right. He hadn't even told her all his madness. How evening after evening, rain or shine, summer or winter, through sleet or storm, a "spirit in his feet" led him whether or no to Katherine Dangerfield's grave. He had no wish to go, but he went—he could not stay away. It had grown such a habit that it seemed to him now if he did not pay that twilight visit she would assuredly visit *him* before morning dawned. He made his daily pilgrimage to this Mecca, and the people of the town had grown tired talking and wondering over it. "He took everything from her when she was alive," they said, "and now that she's dead he plays the hypocrite, and visits her grave every evening. I wonder he isn't afraid she'll rise up and confront him."

Perhaps he was—it had been the mania of his life. Surely Katherine had kept her vow. He was, if there ever was in this world, "a haunted man"—sane enough on all other things—on this, much thinking had made him mad.

He retired early that night—he was less alone shut up by himself than in the drawing-room with his wife and her relatives. All night long candles burned in his bedroom, and one of the men servants slept in an open closet adjoining. Never without light and never alone.

He had grown sleepless, too—and it was generally the small hours before slumber came to him. He arose late next day, breakfasted by himself, and did not join the family until luncheon time.

Miss Herncastle was not at that meal either—it seemed she was to take all hers with the children in the nursery. He had his wife's hauteur and intolerance to thank for something at least.

He returned to his study, spent three hours impaling his beetles and cockchafers, then arose, put on his hat and turned to leave the house. Little Pansy ran up against him in the hall.

"Papa Peter," she said, "do you know wno's come?"

"No."

"Sir Arthur Tregenna. Such a—oh *such* a great big man, with yellow whiskers and a solemn face—as solemn as Miss Herncastle's. We don't like Miss Herncastle—Pearl and me—she won't play with us, and can't dress dolls. We like Aunt Cecil—we do. She was playing 'Hunt the Squirrel' with us when Sir Arthur came up in the fly from the station. He's in the drawing-room now with mamma and Uncle Raoul, and is going to stay ever so long. I wish he had stayed away. Aunt Cecil won't play 'Hunt the Squirrel' now any more. She blushed when he caught her. I hate great big men."

"Ah! yes—at nine—you'll probably change your opinion at nineteen," muttered "papa Peter" cynically, passing out.

Except as they swelled the diurnal bill of household expenses, my lady's visitors were very little concern to my lady's husband. He went on his way now, his hat pulled over his eyes, his small stooping figure bent, his spectacles fixed on the ground—moody, solitary, unhappy—to pay his daily visit to that lonesome grave.

The last light of the July sun came slanting over the downs, through the trees, and lay in ridges of glory upon the graves. It was all strangely hushed here; the town with its bustle, and life, and noise lay behind. Death and silence reigned. He rarely met any one at this hour; the towns-people were taking their tea. Yonder was the house wherein she had died—yonder her grave, with its gray cross and its brief inscription—

KATHERINE,
ÆTAT 17.
RESURGAM.

He knew it so well—he had been here so often. Would he go on coming here, he wondered wearily, as long as he lived.

He paused. What was that? He was near the grave, and standing looking down upon it, her back turned to him, he saw a woman. A woman! His heart gave one great bound, then seemed to turn cold and still. He went on—on—softly over the

grass, impelled by the same irresistible fascination that drew him here. His feet struck a dry twig; it snapped, and the woman turned and looked round. There, over Katherine Dangerfield's grave, looking at him with Katherine Dangerfield's eyes, stood Miss Herncastle, the governess!

## CHAPTER V.

### "ONCE MORE THE GATE BEHIND ME FALLS."

FOR one moment he thought the dead had arisen; for one moment—he stood speechless and spell-bound; for one brief, horrible moment he thought he saw Katherine Dangerfield looking at him across her own grave! She made no attempt to speak, but stood with her icy gaze fixed upon him—her pale, changeless, marble face. He was the first to break the silence.

"Miss Herncastle!" he gasped—"you!"

Her eyes left him, and he moved. While they were riveted upon him he had stood as one under a spell.

"I, Sir Peter!"—the low, soft, sweet tones lingered like music on the ear—"and I fear I have startled you again; but I never dreamed of seeing you here."

"Nor I you. What brings you, a stranger, to this place of all places, Miss Herncastle, so soon after your arrival?"

He asked the question angrily and suspiciously. Surely there was something ominous and sinister in this woman, who looked enough like the dead girl to have been her twin sister, and who visited her grave so speedily.

Miss Herncastle drew her mantle about her tall, slim figure, and turned to go.

"I came out for a walk, Sir Peter. I have been in the school-room all day, and I am not used to such close confinement. I asked my lady's permission to take a walk, and she gave it. I am a rapid walker, and I soon found myself here, the town behind. It looked so peaceful, so calm, so inviting, that I entered. This lonely grave attracted me, and I was reading the inscription as you came up. If I had known it

could have mattered in any way—that I would have disturbed any one by coming—I should not have come.'

She bent her head respectfully, and moved away. Dressed all in black, moving with a peculiarly swift, noiseless, gliding step, she looked not unlike a phantom herself flitting among the graves. And in what an emotionless, level monotone she had spoken, as a child repeats a lesson learned by rote!

He stood and looked after her, darkly, distrustfully. It seemed plausible enough; but that hidden instinct that comes to us to warn us of danger, told him something was wrong.

"Who is she?" he repeated—"who is she? Enough like Katherine to be her twin sister. Who is she?" He stopped suddenly. "Enough like Katherine to be her twin sister!" And why not?—why not Katherine's sister? Who was there to say Katherine never had a sister? He knew nothing of her or her family, save what Mrs. Vavasor chose to tell. Katherine might have had a dozen sisters for what he or she ever knew. A gleam came into his eyes; he set his teeth with some of his old bull-dog resolution. "Katherine is dead and buried—nothing can alter *that;* and this young woman, this Miss Herncastle, is more like her than it is possible for any but sisters to be. I'll find out who Miss Herncastle is, and all about her, and what she's here for, before I'm a month older!"

"Queenie!" Lady Dangerfield said, tossing her cousin a rose-colored, rose-sealed, rose-scented note, "read that."

Lady Cecil caught it. The note was written in big, dashing chirography, and this is what it said:

"ST. JAMES STREET, July 2d.

"DEAREST LADY DANGERFIELD: A million thanks for your gracious remembrance—a million more for your charming invitation. I will be with you on the afternoon of the 4th. From what I hear of it, Scarswood Park must be a terrestrial paradise, but would not *any* place be that where you were? Devotedly,

"JASPER ALGERNON FRANKLAND."

Lady Cecil's brown eyes flashed. The fulsome, florid style of compliment, the familiarity—the easy insolence of the writer—grated like some discordant noise on her nerves. She looked up reproachfully.

"Oh, Ginevra!"

"And, oh, Queenie!" with a short laugh, but not looking round from the stand of guelder-roses over which she was bending. "You see we will not be moped to death down here after all. And we shall have two gentlemen more than we counted

on for our lawn party this afternoon. I wonder what sort of a croquet player Sir Arthur is, by the bye."

"Ginevra, I wish you hadn't asked Major Frankland down here. I detest that man. Sir Peter is jealous. The odious familiar way he addresses you, too, and his horrid, coarse, commonplace compliments. Any place must be a paradise where you are! Bah! Why doesn't he try to be original at least."

"Lady Cecil Clive is pleased to be fastidious," retorted Lady Dangerfield, tearing a guelder-rose to pieces. "Who is original nowadays? To be original means to be eccentric—to be eccentric is the worst possible style, only allowable in poets and lunatics. Major Frankland being neither, only—"

"A well-dressed idiot—"

"Only an everyday gentleman—answers my note of invitation in everyday style. You ought to thank me, Queenie. Who is to entertain Sir Arthur and take him off your hands when you tire of him? Even baronets with thirty thousand a year may pall sometimes on the frivolous mind of a young lady of two-and-twenty. Your father will do his best—and Uncle Raoul's best, when he tries to be entertaining, means a good deal; but still Major Frankland will be a great auxiliary. Queenie, I wonder why you dislike him so much!"

"I dislike all mere club-room loungers, all well-dressed tailors' blocks, without one idea in their heads, or one honest, manly feeling in their hearts. Jasper Frankland knows Sir Peter hates him. If he were a right-feeling man, would he come at all, knowing it?"

"Certainly, when I invite him. And again, and again, and again Sir Peter! I wish Sir Peter was at—Queenie, you have had an excellent bringing-up under the care of that wicked, worldly old dowager, Lady Ruth, but in some things you are as stupid as any red-cheeked, butter-making dairymaid. Talking of ideas, and feeling, and Sir Peter's jealousy—such nonsense! When I did Sir Peter Dangerfield—and, without exception, I believe he is the most intensely stupid and disagreeable little wretch the wide earth holds—when I did him the honor of marrying him, I did it to secure for myself a pleasant home, all the comforts and luxuries of life—and I class the society of pleasant men like Jasper Frankland, chief among those luxuries. He is the best figure, the best style, the best bow, the best waltzer, the best second in a duel, and the best scandal-monger from here to the 'sweet shady side of Pall Mall.' If Sir Peter doesn't like the friends I ask, then I would recommend Sir Peter

to keep out of their sight, and make himself happy in the society of his impaled bugs, and dried butterflies, and stuffed toads. Congenial companionship, I should say—birds of a feather, etc. By the way, what was that long discourse you and he had last evening about? Natural philosophy?"

"No, ghosts," answered Lady Cecil, gravely. "He believes in ghosts. So did the great Dr. Johnson—was it? He isn't quite positive yet that Miss Herncastle is not the disembodied spirit of that poor girl that died here. And he says there is a place three miles off—Bracken Hollow, I believe, haunted to a dead certainty. Now I am going to see that house the very first opportunity. Sir Peter gravely affirms that he has heard the sights and seen the sounds—no—I don't mean that—the other way—*vice versa*."

"My opinion is," said Sir Peter's wife, "that Sir Peter is in a very bad way, and that we shall be taking out a decree of lunacy against him one of those days. Sir Peter may not absolutely be mad, but in the elegantly allegorical language of the day, his head's not level."

"What is that about Sir Peter?" inquired the earl sauntering up. "Mad is he, Ginevra? 'Pon my life I always thought so since he committed his crowning folly of marrying *you*. Pray, what has he done lately?"

"Nothing more than the Right Honorable the Earl of Ruysland has done before him—talked of seeing ghosts. He takes Miss Herncastle, the governess, for a ghost. So did you. Now, Uncle Raoul, whose ghost did you take her for?"

She shot her words back spitefully enough. The earl's little satirical jests were apt to be biting sometimes. She looked at him as she asked the question, but my lord's countenance never changed. Like Talleyrand, if you had kicked him from behind, his face would not show it.

"Does she bear an unearthly resemblance to some lovely being, loved and lost half a century ago, my lord? You remember she gave you quite a start the day of her arrival."

"I remember," said the earl placidly; "but she did not disturb me very greatly. She has a vague sort of resemblance to a lady dead and gone, but not sufficient to send me into hysterics. Queenie, I'm going to the station—you know who comes to-day?"

"Yes, papa," constrainedly.

"If you are going into Castleford, my lord," said Ginevra, "I have two or three commissions I wish you would execute

Queenie, where are you going?—it will not detain me an instant."

"I am going to the nursery. Lessons are over by this time, and Pearl says no one can make dolls' dresses with the skill I can."

She left the room. Lady Dangerfield looked after her, then at her uncle, with a malicious smile.

"If you really want Cecil to marry Sir Arthur Tregenna, all your finesse, all your diplomacy will be required. I foresee thirty thousand trembling in the balance. She is inclined to rebel—talks about being sold and the rest of it. As I said to herself, in spite of her admirable bringing up, her ideas on some subjects are in a deplorably crude and primitive state."

"She *shall* marry Sir Arthur," the earl responded serenely; "it is written—it is destiny. Her ideas have nothing whatever to do with it; and if there be any point of worldly hardness and polish which Lady Ruth may have omitted, who so competent as you, my dear Ginevra, to teach it? I am at peace—my only child is in safe hands. Write out your list quickly, my dear. I shall be late as it is."

His niece laughed, but her eyes flashed a little. It was diamond cut diamond always between the worldly uncle and quite as worldly niece, and yet in their secret hearts they liked each other, and suited each other well.

Lady Cecil reached the school-room. Lessons were just ended, and Miss Herncastle stood looking wearily out of the window at the mellow afternoon radiance—fagged and pale. Lady Cecil glanced at her compassionately.

"You look wearied to death, Miss Herncastle; I am afraid you find the Misses Dalrymple terrible little Neros in pinafores. Do go out for a walk, and Pearl and Pansy and I will go and dress dolls under the trees."

"But, Lady Dangerfield—"

"Lady Dangerfield is in the drawing-room; you can ask her if you choose—she will not object. I am sure you need a walk. Come, children, and fetch your whole family of dolls."

Miss Herncastle obtained permission to take a walk, and set out. As she passed down the noble arching avenue she espied the earl's daughter and the twins solemnly seated under a big beech, sewing for their lives. Lady Cecil looked up, smiled, and nodded approval from her work. Very lovely she looked, the amber sunshine shifting down through the green and ruby leaves on her loose-floating, abundant brown hair, flashing back

from that other amber sunshine in her hazel eyes, from the sweet smiling lips, from the *eau de nil* dress with its innumerable flounces and frillings, its point-lace collar, and cluny borderings. In that shimmering robe, and with a long spray of tangled ivy buds in her hair, she might have been painted for Titania, Queen of the Fairies, herself.

Beautiful as a vision—the belle of the season—sought, courted, caressed, beloved by all. Did the contrast strike somber Miss Herncastle, in her plain brown merino dress, ugly of texture, of color, of make, walking in the dust as she went by? The after days told.

The high red sun dropped half an hour lower. The young ladies and gentlemen invited for my lady's lawn party would be here presently now, and one of the twins' nine dolls, big and little, had had a new dress finished. Lady Cecil looked up, and said she must go. The twins pleaded piteously for one game of "tag," and "Aunt Cecil" consented. The dolls were flung down in an ignominious heap, and Lady Cecil flew in chase of the children with a zest, that for the moment equaled their own. And thus it was, flushed, breathless, dishevelled, laughing, romping like a girl of twelve, Sir Arthur Tregenna saw her first.

The earl had been late—it was the earl's inevitable fate to be late on every occasion in life—and the great Cornish baronet had driven up to Scarswood in a fly like any ordinary mortal. Through a break in the beeches, her clear sweet laugh rang out as the twins pounced upon her, and made her their captive. All aglow, all breathless, she came full upon Sir Arthur.

He was laughing from sympathy with that merry peal. If she had striven for a thousand years to bewitch him she could never have succeeded half so well as in this moment, when she was not thinking of him at all. She stopped short—still laughing, blushing and aghast.

"Lady Cecil Clive, I believe?"

He took off his hat and stood bareheaded before her—tall, noble, gravely smiling, as Lady Cecil gave him her hand.

"Sir Arthur Tregenna, I am sure. Did you not meet—Pansy, be quiet—did you not meet papa? He left here to go to the station."

"I did not meet him. Probably I passed him, for I left the station immediately."

"Then permit me to welcome you in his stead. Ah! here is papa now, and Major Frankland."

A second fly drove up, and for the first and last time in her life, Lady Cecil Clive was glad to see Major Frankland. It was a rare—a very rare thing—for *La Reine Blanche*, trained into perfect high-bred self-possession by three London seasons, to feel a touch of embarrassment in the presence of any one king or kaiser, but she felt it now.

"My dear boy—my dear Arthur!" The earl sprang out and shook the young baronet's hand with effusion. Such a *contretemps*—just a moment too late—I saw you drive off, and I returned with Frankland. Major Frankland, of the —th Lancers—Sir Arthur Tregenna."

The two gentlemen lifted their hats. Sir Arthur rather stiffly, and under restraint—the gallant, whiskered major with that charming ease and grace which had years ago won away Ginevra Dangerfield's heart.

"Aw, my dear Lady Cecil—chawmed to see you again, and looking *so* well—so *very* well; but then we all know, to our cost, *La Reine Blanche* invariably looks her best on every occasion. And here comes our chawming hostess. Aw, Lady Dangerfield, *so* happy to meet you once more. London has been a perfect desert—a howling-aw—wilderness, I assure you, since two of its fairest flowers have ceased-aw—to bloom!"

And then the mistress of Scarswood was greeting and welcoming her guests, and the first detachment of the lawn party began to arrive, and in the bustle Lady Cecil made good her escape.

The travelers were shown to their rooms. She heard them go past—heard the major's aggravating half lisp, half drawl, Sir Arthur's deep, grave tones, and clenched one little hand where it lay on the window sill, and set her scarlet lips hard.

"The sultan has come, and his slave must wait until it pleases him to throw the handkerchief. He comes here to inspect me as he might a horse, or a house he wanted to buy; and if I suit him, I am to be bought. If I do not—Oh, papa! papa! how could you subject me to so shameful an ordeal?"

An imperious tap at the door, an imperious voice without:

"Queenie! Queenie! are you dead? Open the door."

Lady Cecil opened. My lady, all summery muslin, Valenciennes lace, and yellow roses, appeared, her black eyes alight, her cheeks glowing with pleasure and liquid rouge.

"Come, Queenie; you are to be on the opposite side—first red, and all that. Every one has come, and Sir Arthur and the major are on the croquet ground. Really, Cecil, Sir Arthur

isn't bad looking—that is to say, if he were not beside Jasper. Comparisons are odious, and beside him—"

"Of course, beside him, the Angel Gabriel, if he were to descend, would appear to disadvantage. Ginevra, Sir Arthur looks as if he had common-sense, at least; more than I can say for your pet military poodle. Poor little Bijou! if he only knew what a dangerous rival has come to oust him."

"Don't be sarcastic, Queenie," her cousin answered, with perfect good temper; "it's the worst thing can possibly be said of a girl. Makes men afraid of her, you know. You may take Sir Arthur on your side; the major, of course, is on mine; and we shall croquet you off the face of the earth. He plays as he does everything—exquisitely."

They descended together to the croquet ground—an admirable foil—blonde and brunette. Lady Dangerfield knew it, and made the most of it, as she did everything else.

Sir Arthur did not play. He took a seat with the earl on the limit of the croquet ground, and talked and watched the players. The major and Lady Dangerfield played a vigorous game, sending their adversaries' balls to the farthest limits of space, and never missing a hoop. Lady Cecil played abominably; her side was beaten ingloriously in every game. How could she play?—how could she do anything, knowing, feeling, that the eyes of Sir Arthur were upon her, while he calmly deliberated whether or no she were fitted to be his wife.

Lady Cecil was right. Sir Arthur's eyes were upon her, and Sir Arthur was speculating as to whether or no she was fitted to be his wife. What a fair, sweet, proud face it was; how much soul in the softly lustrous eyes; how much gentleness, goodness, about the perfect lips. How like a bright, happy child she had looked as he had seen her first with brown hair flying, brown eyes dancing, rose lips laughing, and pearl cheeks softly flushed, in that bewitching game of romps. Could any one who looked like that—who loved little children and played with them, a very child herself, be the cold-blooded coquette, the vain flirt, who trampled on hearts wholesale, for her selfish gratification? No, no, a hundred times no! Such a face must mirror a pure and spotless soul; eyes like these took their kindness and their sweetness from a gentle and womanly heart.

"Her loveliness makes men her captives. How can she be blamed for that?" he thought. He was beginning to plead for her already; the spell of that "angel face," which had ensnared so many, was beginning to throw its glamour over him. And

he was predisposed to be pleased. He wanted to fulfill his father's dying wish and marry his old friend's daughter.

Lady Cecil's party experienced a third disastrous defeat, and by that time the summer dusk had fallen, and the countless stars were out. Then one of the young ladies from the rectory—young ladies from the rectory are always useful—went into the house and played some delicious German waltzes, the music floating from four high windows, open from floor to ceiling. Lady Cecil waltzed with the rector's tall son, with Squire Talbot from Morecambe, with Major Frankland even, when that splendid officer at last left his liege lady's side. If she had never flirted before, she flirted with Sir Arthur's eyes upon her.

"He shall take me for what I am if he takes me at all," she thought. "I shall never play the hypocrite to entrap him."

What did Sir Arthur think, sitting there, looking on with grave eyes? He did not dance, he did not croquet, he didn't talk much; he was not in any way a carpet knight, or an ornament of society. Frivolous people like Lady Dangerfield were apt to be afraid of him. Those calm, passionless gray eyes looked at you with so earnest a light that you were apt to shrink under them, feeling what a foolish, empty-headed sort of person you were—a man to be respected, beyond doubt—a man not so easily to be liked.

What did he think? Under the stars she looked very lovely, and loveliness in woman covereth a multitude of sins. She waltzed with them all, and Sir Arthur was one of those uncivilized beings you meet now and then who do not like waltzing. Your bride-elect in the arms of another man, even though it *be* in a round dance, is to your ill-trained mind a jarring and indelicate sight. She waltzed until her cheeks flushed and her eyes shone like brown diamonds, and her clear, soft voice and laugh rang out for all. What did he think? The earl frowned inwardly—only inwardly; anything so disfiguring as a frown never really appeared upon his placid, well-trained face. "Wrinkles came soon enough of themselves," he was wont to say; "no need to hasten them on scowling at a world you cannot improve."

There came a call, "supper," and the waltzing ended. The dancers paired off and defiled into the supper room.

"The tocsin of the soul, the dinner bell," laughed Lady Cecil; "and what with three games of croquet and four waltzes I am both hungry and fatigued."

And then the rector's tall, handsome son—a 'Varsity man—

with that flirting manner some young men cultivate, said something in a whisper that looked tender, however it might sound. Sir Arthur's gray eyes saw it all. Was this flirting?—was *La Reine Blanche* at her favorite game?

They went into the brilliantly lighted dining-room, where an Aberdeen salmon, *à la mayonaise*, lay reposing tranquilly in a bed of greenery and prawns, where lobster salad, and cold chicken, and pine-apple cream, and Moselle and strawberries, looked like an epicurean picture under softly abundant gasaliers.

Lady Cecil still kept her victim, the tall, slim college man by her side, and they devoted themselves to one another very exclusively. They were probably discoursing the rival merits of salmon and lobster salad, but they looked as if they were gently murmuring,

"How is it under our control
To love or not to love?"

Sir Arthur had the post of honor on the right of his hostess —Major Frankland supported her on the left. Sir Peter was not present—he sat solitary and alone in his study, like an oyster in its shell, while feasting and merry-making went on around him. And when the great ormolu and malachite clock over the mantel struck the half hour after eleven, the company dispersed, and the guests sought their own rooms. What did Sir Arthur think, as he bade the earl's fair daughter good-night, and watched her float away in her *eau de nil* dress up the stairs and disappear in a silvery shower of moonrays? That impassive face of his gave no sign.

---

## CHAPTER VI.

### SOMETHING VERY STRANGE.

"AND your picnic is inevitable, I suppose, Lady Dangerfield; and one *must* go and grill alive, and yawn all day, and get one's complexion destroyed with the boiling seaside sun, and call it pleasure. You mean well, Ginevra, I dare say, but your ceaseless pleasure excursions grow to be ceaseless bores."

Lady Cecil said all this in the slowest, softest, sleepiest, lazi

est possible tone of voice. She was lying on a sofa, in a loose, white morning robe, her bronze hair all damp, and loose, and out of curl, a book in her hand, and her gold-brown eyes full of lazy languor.

Lady Dangerfield, got up in elaborate walking costume, had just bustled in—she always bustled and made a noise—and had burst forth in a torrent of reproaches at finding her indolent cousin still in a state of semi-undress.

"You laziest, you most indolent of mortals! get up instantly and be off and dress. The carriages will be here in half an hour—twenty minutes I tell you—and you haven't one thing on. The picnic is inevitable, and seeing you were one of the first to organize it, I think it is a little too disgraceful to find you like this at the last moment."

"Like this is so very comfortable though, Ginevra. My novel is really interesting. Countess Aglae, on the eve of her marriage with the Duke of Crowndiamonds, runs away with a charming young head-groom, whose ordinary conversation reads like blank verse. Well if I must I must, I suppose." She threw aside her novel and arose. "It is so preposterously fine and sunshiny this morning, that I am certain we will have a storm before night, and come home drenched. Half an hour did you say, Ginevra, before we start? Tranquillize your nerves then, dear—I shall be ready in half the time."

A week had passed since the afternoon of Sir Arthur's and Major Frankland's arrival, and a very animated week it had been. Lady Dangerfield never grew weary in well-doing; her fertile brain originated pleasure party after pleasure party, with an assiduity worthy a better cause. There had been long excursions to ruins, there had been a day's visit to a distant gypsy encampment, there had been lawn billiards, boating parties, croquet, and drives and gallops to every interesting spot for miles around. There had been Fortnum & Mason's hampers, chickens and champagne, *pâtés de fois gras*, and claret cup, on land and sea, and now a genuine old-fashioned picnic to the seashore was under way; Fortnum & Mason were voted a nuisance; they would boil their own kettle on the sands, and make their own tea, true gypsy style, dispense with the tall gentleman in plush and prize calves from the Hall, and wait upon themselves. My lady, ever on the alert for something new, proposed this, and had been warmly seconded on all sides.

A week had passed since Sir Arthur's arrival—seven long summer days and nights under the same roof with Lady Cecil,

the greatest flirt of the season. What did he think of her by this time? No one could have told; not the young lady, certainly, to whom his manner was calm, friendly, and genial, but as far removed from her experience of love-making, as it was possible to imagine. Not her father, watching him, furtively, impatiently; he bore himself towards her with the same distant, somewhat stiff courtesy he showed his hostess and the other ladies who visited Scarswood.

How was it going to end? Would he propose, or would he, after another week or so, say, "Good-by, Lady Cecil," in the same cool, grave, unsmiling way in which he now said good-morning and good-night? It was such an inscrutable face, that face of his, that it told nothing. This solemn, uplifted manner, those grave tones speaking grave sentences, might be his way of making love, for all the earl knew.

For Cecil herself, she liked it, and liked him all the better for letting her so tranquilly alone. All women—the most hardened coquette among them—like men best who don't lower their flag at once. She was bewitchingly pretty, and fresh and bright, and knew it beyond doubt; but as far as she could see, all her beauty, and brightness, and fascinations were so many arrows that glanced off his polished chain-mail armor. She was singularly free from vanity; in a calm way she was conscious of her own great beauty, as she was proud of her old name, but the smallness of personal conceit she had never felt. And reassured by Sir Arthur's manner, she let herself grow friendly, and pleasant, and familiar, as it was in her genial nature to be. She got down off her stilts, and walked with him, and talked with him, and found, when properly drawn out, he could talk well. He could tell her, by the hour together, of fair, foreign lands, of the East—every inch of which he knew—every sacred place of which he had visited. He could tell her of Australia and its wonderful hidden wealth—of bright, busy, trans-Atlantic cities—of California, where he had lived for months among camps and mines, and the reckless men, the sweepings of the world, who fly there for safety or for gold.

He told her of Algiers, where he had wintered last year, and of how narrowly his life had been saved. He had had many hair-breadth escapes, but none so critical as this. Lost on the desert, a flock of wild Bedouins, inflamed with rapine and liquor, had swept down upon him with shrill cries. He fought against terrible odds as long as he could, then, just as a lance head had pierced him, a horseman had ridden down like the wind, and with

a ringing English cheer had laid about him, right and left, like a lion. Wherever that flashing blade fell, an Arab bit the dust. Then, faint and sick from loss of blood, he reeled from the saddle, and opened his eyes in his own quarters in Algiers.

"And the gallant Englishman who saved you?" Lady Cecil breathlessly asked.

Sir Arthur smiled.

"The gallant Englishman was an Irishman. A very tiger to fight. His name among the Arabs was as great a source of dread as that of Cœur de Lion to the Saracens, or Black Douglas to the Lowland. He was a captain of Chasseurs, his name, O'Donnell."

She was sitting beneath the open window. As he pronounced the name he looked at her, but she had turned suddenly and was gazing steadfastly at the blue summer sky. He looked at her, then spoke again, slowly.

"And he knew *you*," he said.

"Yes," Lady Cecil's tones had changed a little; but she turned now, and the brown eyes met the gray ones quite calmly. "Yes, I did once know a Redmond O'Donnell—six years ago, I think—in Ireland. He mentioned knowing me, did he?"

"By the merest chance. In his quarters one day I came across a book, a very handsome copy of 'Marmion,' with your name on the fly-leaf. You had lent it to him, it appeared, and it had never been returned."

"Captain O'Donnell seems fated to save people's lives," said Lady Cecil, laughing; "he saved mine from drowning. Did he tell you of it? No? That is like his reticence. Are you aware he is in England?"

"No; I am not surprised to hear it, though. He mentioned casually meaning to go out to America—to New Orleans—for his sister, and fetch her over, and leave her with their friends in France. A fine fellow—a brave fellow—a worthy descendant of his once princely house."

Lady Cecil said nothing, but that night at parting she gave Sir Arthur her hand with a kindly cordiality she had never shown before.

"He grows on one," she said, thoughtfully, to her cousin. "I begin to like him."

Ginevra shrugged her shoulders.

"So much the better, dear, for all concerned. Thirty thousand a year is a powerful inducement, I must confess; though he doesn't grow on *me*. He's a prig, as I said before—a sol-

emn pedantic prig—who glowers one out of countenance with his great, solemn, owl eyes, and who can neither dance nor play croquet, who doesn't know one game on the cards, and who invariably treads on one's train. I hate clumsy men, and I'm afraid I shall hate my future cousin-in-law."

The solemn, owl eyes Lady Dangerfield spoke of irritated her beyond measure by the way in which they watched her animated flirtation with Major Frankland. A flirting married woman was an anomaly the tall Cornish baronet could in no wise understand. On this point he was more savagely uncivilized than even Lady Cecil herself. His dark eyes looked in grave wonder and disapprobation at what went on before them —Major Frankland making love *à la mode* to Lady Dangerfield, while Lady Dangerfield's husband either shut himself up in his study with his friends, the black beetles, or else glared in impotent jealous wrath at his wife and her attendant cavalier.

He and Lady Cecil had grown friends surely and imperceptibly. They were a great deal together, and the noble brow of my Earl of Ruysland began to clear. Cecil knew what she was about, of course; she wasn't going to fall at his feet the instant he arrived; if he were a true knight he would be willing to woo and win so fair a lady. With her charming face to plead her cause, his charming fortune to plead his, there could be no manner of doubt as to the issue.

Sir Arthur, Lady Cecil, the earl, and a young lady in apple-green muslin went together in the barouche. Lady Dangerfield drove Major Frankland in her pony phaeton. The rest of the young ladies followed in a second barouche, with two cavaliers on horseback. The only married lady of the party being the baronet's wife—who played chaperone and propriety! Sir Peter had discovered a new specimen of the *Saturina Pavonia Major*, and did not go.

It was an intensely hot day, the sun pouring down its fiery heat from a sky as deeply blue as that of Italy—the heat quivering in a white mist over the sea. Not a breath of air stirred; the sea lay asleep, one vast polished lake, under that globe of molten gold.

"I knew we would grill to death—I said so," Lady Cecil remarked; "but where is the use of warning Ginevra when she is bent upon anything. The three children survived the Fiery Furnace, and we *may* survive this, but I doubt it."

"Don't be so plaintive, Queenie," her father interposed; "you'll survive, I dare say, but you won't have a shred of com-

**plexion left.** You blonde women never can stand sunshine. Now Ginevra is the happy possessor of a complexion which all the suns of Equatorial Africa couldn't darken or spoil. Seeing," this *sotto voce*, "that it's made up of *Blanc de Perle* and liquid rouge."

"It is warm," Sir Arthur remarked, looking at the fair lily face beside him; "and there is not a tree, nor a shrub even, to ward it off. Suppose we go in search of verdure and shade, as we used to do in the Great Desert. My traveler's instinct tells me there is an oasis not far off."

"Yes; go by all means, Queenie," murmured the earl; "and when you have found that oasis send me back word, and I'll join you. At present I am reduced to that state in which a man's brain feels like melted butter, and each limb several tons weight. I shall lie down here on the sand and compose myself to balmy slumber."

Sir Arthur proffered his arm—Lady Cecil took it. The picnic party were pretty well dispersed by this time. Ginevra and the major and one of the rector's daughters had put off to sea in a little boat; Squire Talbot was making himself agreeable to the young lady in apple-green muslin; the rest had paired off like the procession of animals in a child's Noah's Ark. As well go on an exploring expedition with Sir Arthur as remain there to watch the slumbers of the author of her being; and so the Cornish baronet and the earl's daughter started in search of the oasis.

It was not unpleasant being alone with Sir Arthur. In company, as a rule, he had nothing whatever to say; society small-talk was as Greek to him; the new styles, the latest fashionable novel, the last prima donna or danseuse—all these topics were Sanscrit to him, or thereabout. But alone with an appreciative listener, he could talk, and talk well—not of his travels alone—on all subjects. He spoke of things high above the reach of most of the men she had met, and Lady Cecil being a young lady of very fair intellect, as the female intellect goes, appreciated him, was interested, delighted, quite breathless indeed in her absorption at times.

They had gone on now for nearly a mile—very slowly, of course, with the mid-day thermometer at that ridiculous height in the shade, where shade there was none. He was telling her of a frightful gorilla hunt he had once had in Africa, and just at the moment when the climax was reached when the gorilla

came in sight, and Lady Cecil's eyes and lips were apart, and breathless, he stopped as if he had been shot.

"Lady Cecil," he cried, "it is going to rain." Patter! one great drop, the size of a pea, fell splash on Lady Cecil's startled, upturned face. The sun still shone dazzlingly, but a huge black thunder cloud had gathered over their heads, threatening instant explosion.

Plump came another great drop on Lady Cecil's pink silk and white lace parasol. Oh, such a flimsy shield from a rain storm, and Lady Cecil's Paris hat had cost ten guineas only the week before, and Lady Cecil's summer dress was of Swiss muslin and lace, and her bronze slippers with their gay rosettes, delightful for dry sand and sunshine, but not to be thought of in connection with a summer shower.

"What shall we do?" she exclaimed. "I don't mind getting my death of cold in a drenching, but to go back and face the rest, sheltered, no doubt, by the carriages,—all dripping and drowned—no, Sir Arthur, I can't do that."

Sir Arthur had been scanning the horizon with eagle glance.

"I see a house," he said; "at least I see a tall chimney, and where there is a chimney there must be shelter. Let us make for it, Lady Cecil—we can reach it in five minutes, if we run. Can you run?"

"Certainly I can run," answered *La Reine Blanche.* "What a question for *you* to ask, of all people, as though you didn't stand and laugh at me the afternoon you arrived, romping like a lunatic with Ginevra's children. Oh, dear! how fast the drops are coming. Now, then, Sir Arthur—a fair field and no favor!"

And then, with her clear, merry laugh, the haughty, handsome belle of last season gathered up her flowing, flimsy skirts, bowed her bright head, and sped away like a deer before the storm. Sir Arthur ran, too; one may be never so dignified, and yet scamper for their lives before a thunder storm. And Lady Cecil laughed, and Sir Arthur laughed, and faster, faster, faster, fell the light black drops, and twenty years of ordinary acquaintance could not have brought them so near together as that hour. On and on, faster and yet faster, the rain pursuing them like an avenging fury, a great peal of thunder booming above their heads. Blacker and bigger that great cloud grows; patter, patter, falls the rain; it will be down in torrents directly. There is a flash blindingly bright, and then—Heaven be praised!—the tall chimney is reached, and it proves to be a

house! Sir Arthur flings wide the gate, and they skurry into the garden, thickly sheltered by fir-trees, and pause at last, wet, panting breathlessly, laughing, and look into each other's flushed faces.

"I knew I could beat you, Sir Arthur," is the first thing Lady Cecil says, as well as she can for her throbbing heart-beats. "Oh, what a race! And my poor parasol, and my lovely hat—spoiled! I can't see anything to laugh at, Sir Arthur—it *was* a beauty, though you mayn't have had soul enough to appreciate it. And my slippers—see!"

She held out one slim foot—oh, Queenie, was it coquetry?—and the beautiful bronze slippers, the gay little rosettes, were ruined. "And your feet are wet," Sir Arthur exclaimed; "that is worst of all. And there is danger under these trees, in this lightning. We must make for the house. What place is this?"

"I don't know. A most dismal and gruesome place, at least. Good gracious! what a flash; and—oh, Heavens! Sir Arthur, did you see that?"

She gave a little scream and caught his arm.

He followed her eye—to the front windows of the house—just in time to catch a glimpse of a woman's face as she pulled some one hastily away from the panes.

"That woman! do you know her?" he asked.

But Lady Cecil stood like one struck dumb, gazing with all her eyes.

"Do you know her?" he repeated in surprise.

"It is—it *is*—it is—Miss Herncastle!"

"Well, and who is Miss Herncastle? Does she live here?"

"Live here?" She looked at him. "It is Ginevra's governess. And that other face—that awful, gibbering, mouthing face she drew away. Ugh!" she shuddered and drew closer to him. "You did not look in time to see it, but—of all the woeful, unearthly faces,—and then Miss Herncastle came and dragged it away. Now what in the wide world brings *her* here?"

"Suppose we go up to the house and investigate. Are you aware you are growing wetter every instant? Now, Lady Cecil, another race."

They fled through the rain—coming down in buckets full by this time—to the house, and into the low stone porch. Crash went Sir Arthur's thunder on the panels. The door yielded to

that tremendous knock and flew open, and they stood face to face with a tall, gaunt, grim old woman.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," the baronet said; "I didn't mean to force an entrance in this way. We got caught in the storm, and fled here for shelter. Will you permit this lady to enter?"

"As you've bust the door open a'ready, I suppose you may," retorted the old woman, in no very hospitable tone, and casting no very hospitable glance on the two intruders. "Come in if you like, and sit down."

She pointed to a couple of wooden chairs, then went out of the room, and upstairs. And then there came from down those stairs a long, low, wailing cry, so wild, so unearthly, so full of infinite misery, that Lady Cecil, with a second cry of alarm, caught hold of the baronet's arm and looked at him with terrified eyes.

"Did you hear that?" she gasped.

Yes, Sir Arthur had heard it—rather discomposed himself. He held her hand and listened. Would that weird cry be renewed? No; a heavy door slammed above, then perfect silence fell.

"Let us leave this horrid house and that harsh-looking old woman," exclaimed Lady Cecil. "I believe the place, whatever else it may be, is uncanny. Of two evils I prefer the rain."

"The rain is by no means the lesser evil of the two. I fear I must be arbitrary, my dear Lady Cecil, and insist upon your remaining at least ten minutes longer. By that time the lightning and rain will have ceased. That *was* a strange cry—it sounded like one in great pain."

The door re-opened and the old woman re-entered. She glanced suspiciously at the lady and gentleman seated by the window.

"I hope my raven didn't frighten the young lady," she said; "he do scream out most unearthly. That was him you heard just now."

She looked at them again, as though to see whether this statement was too much for their credulity.

Sir Arthur smiled.

"It did startle us a little, I confess. Your raven has a most lugubrious voice, my good woman. Will you tell us the name of this place?"

"It be Bracken Hollow."

"Bracken Hollow," Lady Cecil repeated the name in a still more startled voice.

She had her wish then sooner than she had expected—she was in Sir Peter's haunted house.

"Ay, your ladyship, Bracken Hollow, a main and lonesome place—main and lonesome. Ye will have heard of it, maybe. Ye're from the Park beyond now, I'll lay?"

"Yes, we're from the Park. Do you live here in this lonely place quite by yourself?"

"Not quite, your ladyship; alone most of the time, but odd days a young woman from the town comes to help me redd up. Ye will hev seen her, mayhap, at the upper window as ye came in?"

Again she looked searchingly, anxiously, it seemed to the baronet. He hastened kindly to reassure her.

"We did catch a glimpse of a face for a second at one of the upper windows. I suppose you are rarely intruded upon here as we intruded upon you just now?"

"Ay, rarely, rarely. I mind once"—she rocked herself to and fro and looked dreamily before her—"I mind just once afore a young couple got ketched in the rain as ye did, and came here shelter. That was six years ago—six long years ago—and there's been many sad and heavy changes since then. He was rare an' handsome that day, and she—oh, it's a queer world—a queer world."

"Lady Cecil, the rain has ceased—I think we may venture forth now. Good-day to you, madame, and thanks for the shelter your roof has afforded."

He laid a sovereign in her skinny hand. She arose, dropped him a curtsey and watched him out of sight.

"A fine gentleman and free with his money, and she—ah, it's a beautiful face, and it's a proud face, but there's always trouble in store for them as carries their heads so high, and them haughty eyes always sheds most tears. A fine gentleman and a beautiful lady, but there's trouble in store for them—trouble, trouble."

## CHAPTER VII.

### "THERE IS MANY A SLIP," ETC.

LADY CECIL'S wet feet were considerably wetter before she reached the picnic party on the sand. But there was no help for it, and she laughed good-naturedly at all Sir Arthur's anxious predictions of future colds.

"Mishaps and misadventures, rain-storms and general demoralization of one's raiment, are what one inevitably expects at picnics. It is in the nature of things for lightning storms to come up in the midst of all pleasure excursions. I wonder if the carriages safely protected those we left behind; and above all, I hope Ginevra and her party were not out in that fairy bark of theirs when the squall arose."

But they were. Two hours had elapsed between Sir Arthur and Lady Cecil leaving the pleasure party and their return, and during those two hours dire misfortunes had befallen. The whole picnic party were assembled in one excited group as the two wanderers came up in their midst—the major, Lady Dangerfield, and the rector's daughter, dripping from head to foot like a triad of sea deities. Lady Cecil gave a gasp.

"Sir Arthur! Look here! the boat has upset!"

The boat had. Lady Dangerfield, excitedly and eloquently poured out the tale of their hair-breadth escape as they approached.

They were a mile-and-a-half or thereabouts from the shore when the thunder-storm had so swiftly arisen, and they had turned and put back at once. But before they had gone ten yards, either owing to the major's mismanagement, or the sudden striking of the squall, away went the little boat, keel uppermost, and down into the ruffled sea, with ringing shrieks of affright, went the two ladies and their military protector. The major could swim—so could Miss Hallan, the rector's daughter. Flinging one arm about Lady Dangerfield the major struck out for the shore, but an awful panic had seized the baronet's wife; sudden death stared her in the face, and all presence of mind deserted her. She struggled in the major's clasp, clinging to him the while, and shrieking frantically. In vain the major implored and entreated. "For Heaven's sake, Ginevra, be still and I will save you." In vain the affrighted

party on the shore, forgetful of rain now descending in floods, added their shouted prayers to hers. In vain! Lady Dangerfield screamed and struggled, and the picnic party was in a fair way of winding up with a tragedy, when a boat skimming like a bird over the dancing waters, and skillfully handled by one man, shot toward them, swift and straight as an arrow.

"Hold on there," a voice from the boat shouted. "You'll go down to a dead certainty if you plunge about like that much longer."

The boat flew nearer. The man leaned over and picked up my lady. Major Frankland scrambled in after.

"Rather a close finish!" their deliverer said, coolly. "You were doing your best to make the bottom. Are you all right there, sir? Look after the lady, will you? I think she is going to faint."

But Lady Dangerfield did not faint—too much cold water, perhaps. She glanced at her preserver, and noticed, even in that moment, that he was one of the very handsomest men it had ever been her good fortune to behold. She glanced at herself. Good Heaven! half the exquisite abundance of curls and braids she had set forth with that morning were miles out at sea, her complexion was a wretched ruin, and her lovely pink grenadine, in which she had looked not a day over twenty-five one short hour ago—that pink grenadine, all puffings, and frillings, and flounces—no, words are poor and weak to describe the state of that dress.

The boat, flying before the rising wind, made the shore in five minutes. Lady Dangerfield had not spoken one word; tears of shame and mortification were standing in her eyes. Why, oh, why, had she ever come on this wretched trip—this miserable picnic, at all? What business had Major Frankland to propose going out in a boat when he wasn't capable of handling a boat? What a fright she must look—hatless, hairless, comparatively complexionless, and her bright, gossamer summer skirts clinging about her like wet leeches? What must this remarkably good-looking and self-possessed gentleman sitting yonder steering, think of her? He was not thinking of her at all; he was watching, with an amused face, Miss Hallan calmly and deliberately swimming ashore, and all the other people standing like martyrs in the rain.

"Now, then, madam!" He sprang out and almost lifted her on the sands. "Very sorry for your mishap, and if I might presume to offer a suggestion, would recommend an instant

return home and a change of garments. Good-day, sir; your boat's all right—floating ashore."

And then this cool gentleman, without waiting for thanks or further ado, pushed off again, and skimmed away like a seagull.

Such a plight as this pleasure party stood in when Sir Arthur and Lady Cecil rejoined them! Wet through, all their fine feathers spoiled—every one of the ladies in as miserable a plight as the shipwrecked party themselves—every one drenched to the skin. Lady Cecil's dark eyes, full of suppressed fun, were lifted to the baronet's; there was a grave smile even at the corners of *his* sedate mouth. It was wonderful how they understood each other, and how much nearer they were then than they had been that morning.

Of course the picnic broke up in most "admired disorder" and at once. The wet mermaids were packed damp and dripping into the carriages and whirled away to Scarswood as fast as the horses could trot the distance, Lady Dangerfield bewailing her fate, her narrow escape for her life, and anon wondering who her preserver could be.

"He had the air of a military man," she said; "there was no mistaking it; and he was bronzed and bearded, and somewhat foreign-looking. A gentleman, beyond a shadow of a doubt, with a bow of a Lord Chesterfield or a court chamberlain, and the whitest teeth I ever saw."

It was evident Major Frankland had a rival.

"I wish I had asked his name, and invited him to call," my lady went on. "Common courtesy required it, but really I was so confused and frightened, and all the rest of it, that I thought of nothing. Abominable in Jasper Frankland to let the boat upset. I'll never forgive him. What *could* that stranger have thought of me—such a horrible fright as I must look."

"My dear Ginevra, does it matter *what* this stranger thinks? We are all grateful to him for coming to your rescue so opportunely, but as to his good opinion, I don't perceive that that is a matter of consequence one way or the other."

"One doesn't want to look like a scarecrow," returned her ladyship, indignantly, "even before strangers; and he was *so* distinguished looking, and had the finest eyes, Queenie. Perhaps he may be one of the officers from the Castleford barracks."

"I thought we had had all the officers from the Castleford, and if any of them are eminently distinguished-looking, I have hitherto failed to perceive it."

"We might have had him over for our theatricals to-morrow night, if I had only had presence of mind enough to ask his name. But how can one have presence of mind when one is drowning? And to lose my hat and my—my chignon, and everything! Queenie, how is it that you have escaped so completely? Where did Sir Arthur take you?"

"To Bracken Hollow. We were caught in the first of the storm, and had to run for it. Such a race! Even Sir Arthur Tregenna, the most dignified of mankind, does *not* look dignified, scampering away from a rain-storm."

Lady Cecil laughed maliciously. "It does people good to come down off their stilts once in a while, and put their high and—mightiness in their pocket. Really, it has been a day of extraordinary adventures altogether."

"Yes," said Lady Dangerfield crossly; "and adventures are much nicer to read of than to take part in. I don't want adventures out of Mudie's select novels."

"A day of adventures," went on Lady Cecil, laughing. "You get upset in the midst of the raging ocean, lightning flashing, thunder crashing, rain falling—and what rhymes to falling, Ginevra, besides bawling? And at the last moment, up rushes the gallant knight to the rescue, handsome, of course, gentlemanly also, military likewise, and with the bow of—a court chamberlain, I think you said? And for me, *my* knight takes me into the Haunted Castle, and we hear and see the ghost of Bracken Hollow."

"Oh, Sir Arthur *is* your knight then, is he?" interrupted her ladyship sarcastically. "I thought it would come to that in the end. We don't refuse thirty thousand a year, do we, Queenie, darling, in spite of all our fine poetical, cynical talk of buying and selling. And what Bracken Hollow? And what ghost?"

"*What* Bracken Hollow! There's only one, and your husband says it's haunted. I suppose he ought to know; he seems an authority on the subject of goblins and ghosts. Of my own knowledge, I can say it is as dismal and dull a looking place as ever I laid eyes on—in the words of the poet, 'A lonesome lodge that stands so low in lonely glen.' And a grim and somber old woman—a sort of Sussex 'Norna of the Fitful Head'—presides over it. And at an upper window we saw a most ghostly face, and from an upper chamber we heard a most ghostly cry. 'Norna of the Fitful Head' accounted for it in some way about a raven and a country girl; but I don't think she expected us to believe it. And then I am sure—certain—I saw—"

But Lady Cecil paused. Why should she create an unpleasantness between the governess and Lady Dangerfield by telling of seeing *her* there? That there was no mistake she was convinced. Miss Herncastle's was not a face to be mistaken anywhere—not at all the sort of face we mean when we say "it will pass in a crowd." Most people in any crowd would have turned to look twice at the very striking face of my lady's nursery governess.

Lady Cecil went up to her room at once, and rang for her maid. In her damp dress she stood before the open window while she waited, and looking down she saw, immediately beneath her, in the rose garden, Miss Herncastle! Miss Herncastle, calm, composed, pale, grave, lady-like, and looking, with her neatly arranged dress and serene manner, as though she had been there for hours, the last person possible to be guilty of any escapade whatever. She looked up, smiled, bowed, turned slowly, and disappeared down a lime walk.

Lady Cecil stood transfixed. What did it mean? Miss Herncastle looked a very clever person, but she was not clever enough, surely, to be in two places at once. That was Miss Herncastle she had seen at Bracken Hollow less than an hour ago, and now Miss Herncastle was here. She could not have walked the distance in the time—she could not have ridden. And if it wasn't Miss Herncastle, who then was it she had seen?

"Oh, nonsense!" Lady Cecil cried, tapping her slippered foot impatiently. "I know better. It *was* Miss Herncastle. Desirée," to her maid. "I see Miss Herncastle down there. How long is it since she came in?"

"Came in," Desirée repeated, opening her brown French eyes. "But, mademoiselle, Mees Herncastle wasn't out at all. She has been in the school-room with her young ladies."

"Are you *sure*, Desirée?"

"Yes, mademoiselle," Desirée was sure. That is—she had been in the servants' hall herself, and not in the grounds, but of course Miss Herncastle—

"That will do, Desirée. You pull my hair when you brush and talk together. Make haste!"

Desirée made haste, and in fresh slippers and rosettes, fresh organdie and ribbons, Lady Cecil tripped away to the school-room. Pearl and Pansy were there, making houses of cards. Down went the cards, and the twins surrounded Aunt Cecil immediately.

"Did she see the lightning—oh, wasn't it awful? And the thunder—wasn't she frightened? They were. They went up to the nursery and crept into bed, and pulled the clothes over their faces—and never spoke till it was all over."

"A very praiseworthy precaution, my pets. And where, all this time, was Miss Herncastle?"

"Oh, Miss Herncastle—poor Miss Herncastle—had *such* a headache, and had to go to bed, and they were *so* glad. Not for the headache, of course—they were sorry for poor Miss Herncastle—but glad that they had had a holiday. And that other dress for Seraphina"—Seraphina was the biggest of the dolls—"when would Aunt Cecil make that?"

"To-morrow, if possible. And so Miss Herncastle had a bad headache and had to go to bed. Hum-m-m. When did she take it?"

"Oh, right after you all went away. And she went up to her room with some vinegar, and pulled down the blinds, and locked the door, and told Mrs. Butler she would try to sleep it off. She got up just before you came home—I saw her come out of her room and go down to the garden."

The door opened and Miss Herncastle came in, her roses and myrtle in her hand. She bowed to Lady Cecil with a slight smile, crossed the room with easy grace, and placed her bouquet in a Parian vase.

"I regret to hear you have been suffering from a severe headache all day, Miss Herncastle," Lady Cecil said, and the amber-clear brown eyes fixed themselves full upon the face of the governess. "Pansy tells me you have been lying down all day. But for that I should positively think it was *your* face I saw at a window of the house in Bracken Hollow."

The face of the governess turned from the flowers over which she was bending—the deep gray eyes met the searching brown ones steadily.

"Thought you saw *me*, Lady Cecil! How very strange. And Bracken Hollow—where is Bracken Hollow?"

"Bracken Hollow is within easy walking distance of Scarswood, Miss Herncastle: and you are right, it *is* very strange. I was positive it was you I saw."

"You were mistaken, of course," the governess said, calmly; "it seems my fate to be mistaken. I had a headache, as Pansy says, and was obliged to go to my room. I am unfortunately subject to bad nervous headaches."

Her face was perfectly calm—not a tremor, not a flinch of

eye or muscle. And again Lady Cecil was staggered. Surely this was truth or most perfect acting. If Miss Herncastle had spent the day in her own room she could not have spent it at Bracken Hollow. And if it were not Miss Herncastle she had seen, who on earth then was it?

Thoroughly mystified, the earl's daughter descended the stairs. In the vestibule sat the hall porter, the *Castleford Chronicle* in his hand, his gaze meditatively fixed on the rainbow spanning the sky.

"Johnson, have you been here all day—*all* day, mind?"

Johnson turned from the rainbow and made a bow.

"Yes, my lady—which I meanter say my lady hexcepting of corse while I was at dinner—all the rest of the day, my lady."

"And did any one leave the house during our absence?—any one—the children—the servants?"

"No, my lady," Mr. Johnson responded, rather surprised, "not that *I* see, my lady. And it would be himpossible for hanny one to come, *without* my seeing, my lady. The young ladies, they wasn't on the grounds all day, my lady, likewise none of the servants. Mrs. Butler she were a-making hup long haccounts in her hown room, and Miss 'Erncastle she were a layin' down with the 'eadache, my lady. And there wern't no callers, my lady."

Lady Cecil turned away with a dazed look. She had no wish to play the spy upon Miss Herncastle. If she *had* been to Bracken Hollow, and had owned to it, Lady Cecil might have wondered a little, but she would have said nothing about it. She said nothing about it as it was, but she puzzled over it all the evening. The picnic party, rejuvenated, dined at Scarswood. Sir Peter left the *Saturnia Pavonia*, and dined with his guests—my lady's rather; and my lady herself, in fresh raven ringlets, fresh bloom, and fresh robe of gold-colored tissue and white roses, looked as pretty and as animated as though ten pounds' sterling worth of tresses had not drifted out to sea, and a lovely new toilet had been utterly ruined.

"I *wish* I had thought of asking him his name," Lady Dangerfield remarked, over and over again, returning to the Unknown. "A gentleman, I am positive—there is no mistaking the air of society; and an officer; I should know a trooper in the pulpit or in his coffin, there is no mistaking their swing. And he had the most expressive eyes I think I ever saw."

"Your close observation does him much honor," said Major Frankland with suppressed jealousy. "He is, in all probabil-

ity, some wandering tourist, or artist unknown to fame and Trafalgar Square. It would be cruel, I suppose, to hint at his being a commercial traveller, down from the metropolis with his samples."

"Gad! he looked like some one I've met before," muttered the earl, glancing uneasily at his daughter. "*He* was in London the night of the opera, and it is just possible he may have followed us down here. Only that it would not be like him—proud as Lucifer he used to be; and then I should think, too, he had got over the old madness. Did you see this unknown knight-errant, Queenie?"

"I? No, papa; it was all over before we came up. The curtain had fallen on the grand sensational tableau, the hero of the piece had fled; Sir Arthur and I were only in time for the farce."

The earl stroked his iron-gray mustache, reassured.

"If it be O'Donnell, and 'pon my life I think it is, I only hope Sir Arthur may speak before *he* appears again on the scene. Not that she cares for him, of course, or that his appearance will make any difference in the result. It was only a girl's, only a child's fancy—and it is six years ago. What woman ever remembered an absent lover six years?—a husband for that matter? They say Penelope did; but we have only their word for it. I dare say, while Ulysses was flirting on that island with Queen Calypso and Miss Eucharis, she was flirting at home, and looking out for his successor. The only unpleasant thing about it will be, if they discover the little counterplot *I* indulged in at that time. It's odd Sir Arthur don't propose. He is greatly taken with her, that is evident, and though she doesn't encourage him, she is friendly enough."

Sir Arthur *was* taken with her. His eyes followed that fairy, graceful figure everywhere; he stood by the piano while she sang, and she sang very sweetly, his eyes on the perfect face, his ear drinking in these silver sounds. He was at his ease with her; he talked to her as he had never talked to any woman in his life; she was fair and good, lovely and gentle. Why should he not make her his wife? If that exquisite flower-face of hers had wrought dire havoc ere now with the too-susceptible hearts, was she to be blamed? She might not be quite his ideal, perhaps—but which of us ever meets or marries our ideal?—and he liked her very well—very well, and admired her greatly. Why not speak, then, and ask her to be his wife?

He resolved this question in bed that night until he fell asleep. Of love, such as he had heard of and read of—that intermittent fever of cold fits and hot fits, of fear, of hope, of jealousy, of delight—he knew nothing. That mad fever into which common-sense never enters isn't a dignified passion; a man on his knees to a woman, calling upon all the gods to witness how he worshiped her, is not an elevating or majestic sight. He was not a lover of the usual hot-headed, hare-brained sort, all wearing the same bright armor, all singing the same sweet song. But he esteemed, and admired, and liked Lady Cecil. She was his equal in every way, save fortune, and that he neither thought of nor cared for, and the very next day that ever shone he would ask her to be his wife.

For Sir Arthur Tregenna to resolve was to do. He was none of your vacillating lovers, who don't know their own minds, and who are afraid to speak when they do. Without being in the least a coxcomb, he felt pretty sure of his answer. Her father wished it, she did not seem at least to dislike him, and as husband and wife they would learn to love each other, no doubt, very dearly. His eyes followed her that day as they had never followed her before—with a new interest, a new tenderness. And Lady Dangerfield's sharp black eyes saw it as they saw everything.

"Thine hour has come, oh, Queenie," she laughed maliciously. "The grand mogul has made up his mind to fling his handkerchief at his slave's feet. Look your loveliest to-night, *La Reine Blanche*, for the great Cornish baronet is going to lay his title and fortune at your feet."

The color flashed hotly for a moment over the exquisite, drooping face—a flush of pain, of almost dread. Her woman's instinct told her also, as well as Ginevra, that Ginevra was right. He was going to ask her to be his wife, and she—what should she say? What could she say but yes? It was her destiny as fixed as the stars. A sort of panic seized her. She did not love him, not one whit, and Lady Cecil Clive at two-and-twenty—old enough to know better, certainly, and admirably trained by a thorough woman of the world—a woman of the world herself—out three seasons—believed in love!

I am pained to tell, but the truth stands—she believed in love. She read De Masset, and Meredith, and Tennyson—she even read Byron sometimes. She liked him—as she might a grave, wise, very much elder brother, but love him—no—no—no!

And Lady Cecil knew what love meant. Once, oh, how long ago it seemed! for seven golden weeks the sun had shone, and the roses flamed in the light. Earth had been Eden, and the Someone that we all see a day or two in our lifetime had appeared before her, and then—the seven weeks ended, and life's dead level flowed back. That dream of sweet sixteen was ended, and well nigh forgotten, it might be; but she didn't care for Sir Arthur Tregenna, and he was going to ask her, and there was nothing to say but "Yes."

She avoided him all that day, as she had never avoided him before in all her life. If her chains were to be clasped, at least she would avert the fetters as long as she could. She shut herself up in her room, took a book, and forced herself to read. She would not think, she would not come down. It had to be, but at least she would have a respite in spite of them all.

The lovely, rosy July day wore on, and dinner time came. She had to go down then. As Owen Meredith says:

> "We may live without books—what is knowledge but grieving?
> We may live without hope—what is hope but deceiving?
> We may live without love—what is passion but pining?
> But where is the man that can live without dining?"

Her respite was over. She must face her doom. She went down in white silk and pearls. There was to be an evening party—theatricals, charades, dancing—a large company were coming. She was as white as her dress, but perfectly calm. They were ever a brave race, the Clives, going to the scaffold or to the altar without wincing once.

Sir Arthur took her in to dinner—gentlemen never know when they are not wanted. He was very silent during that meal, but then silence was his *forte*. Lady Cecil, usually the brightest of the bright, was under a cloud too. She cast furtive, sidelong glances at her companion. Oh, her doom was sealed—that compressed mouth, that stern face, those grave, inexorable eyes told the story. Do her best, she could not shirk fatality long.

She made her escape after dinner, unnoticed, as she fondly hoped, amid the gay throng. A bright little boudoir, all rose silk and ormolu, and cabinet pictures, opened off one of the drawing-rooms, double doors and a velvet curtain shutting it in. Thither this stricken deer fled. The double doors slid back, the rose velvet curtain fell, and she was alone, amid the pictures and the bric-à-brac, with the crystal moonrays.

She sank down in a dormeuse in the bay window, drew a great breath of relief, and looked out. How peaceful it was, how sweet, how hushed, how lonely. Oh, why couldn't life be cast in some blissful Arcadian valley, where existence might be one long succession of ruby sunsets and silver moonrises, where nightingales sing the world to sleep, where young ladies need never get married at all if they like, and thirty thousand a year is not a necessity of life? She clasped her hands, and looked up almost passionately at that bright opal-tinted star-set sky.

"Oh!" she said, "I wish, I wish, I *wish*, I need not marry Sir Arthur Tregenna."

"Lady Cecil, I beg your pardon for this intrusion, but they have sent me here to find you."

Her clasped hands fell—her hour had come. Sir Arthur stood tall and serious before her. She looked up, all her terror, all her helpless appeal for an instant in her large, soulful eyes. But he did not read it aright—what man ever does? And he came forward hastily, eagerly. How beautiful she looked, how noble, how sweet,—a wife for any man to be proud of. He stooped over her and took her hand. The words were on his lips—in one minute all would be over!

"Lady Cecil," he began. "I have sought you here to—"

He never finished the sentence.

The door slid back, the curtain was lifted, and Miss Herncastle came into the room.

---

## CHAPTER VIII.

### REDMOND O'DONNELL.

WITH the golden blaze of the illuminated drawing-room behind her, with rose-velvet curtains half draping her, the moonlight full upon her pale face and jet black hair—so for one second she stood before them. So Sir Arthur Tregenna saw her first, so in her sleeping and waking dreams all her life long, Cecil Clive remembered her, standing like some rose-draped statue in the arch.

"Lady Cecil," began the soft, slow *legato* voice, "Lady Dangerfield has sent me in search—" She broke off suddenly;

she had advanced a step, and for the first time perceived that Lady Cecil was not alone. I beg your pardon," she said, "but I was not aware—"

"Wait—wait, Miss Herncastle!" Lady Cecil exclaimed, rising up with a great breath of intense relief. "Lady Dangerfield sent you in search of me, I suppose? Has anybody come? Are they preparing for the Charades?"

"Yes, Lady Cecil, and they are waiting for you. There's the music."

"You play, Sir Arthur, do you not?" Lady Cecil turned to him, and then for the first time perceived him gazing intently at Miss Herncastle. He was wondering who she was—this tall, majestic woman, so unlike any woman he had as yet met in this house. "Ah! I forgot, you don't know Miss Herncastle. Sir Arthur Tregenna, Miss Herncastle. How odd to live in the same house a week and a half, and never once meet. Hark! is not that Ginevra's voice calling?"

"Queenie! Queenie!" called the shrill, impatient voice of her ladyship; "are you asleep or dead, or in the house, or what? *Where* are you?"

She too lifted the curtains and stared at the group in indignant surprise.

"What on earth are you all doing here in the moonlight? Sir Arthur, I think I sent you after Lady Cecil Clive. Miss Herncastle," sharply, "I think I sent *you*—. Is there some enchantment in this sylvan spot that those who enter it can never come forth?"

She looked pointedly at the baronet. Had he had time to propose? He was not a man of fluent speech or florid compliment, like her gallant major—he only smiled in his grave way, and came forth.

Lady Cecil had sped away like the wind already, and Miss Herncastle, with the stately air and grace of a young queen, was more slowly following.

"Who *is* that?" Sir Arthur asked under his breath.

"Who? Do you mean Miss Herncastle—my governess?"

"Your governess? She looks like an empress."

"Absurdly tall, isn't she?—half a giantess. Do you like tall women? No; don't trouble yourself to turn a compliment. I see you do. Miss Herncastle is to assist to-night in the tableaux—that is why you see her here."

That old, never-failing resource of country houses, charades and *tableaux vivants* were to enliven the guests at Scarswood to-

night. The disused ball-room had been fitted up as a theater, with stage and seats, the Castleford military band was already discoursing martial music, and the well-dressed audience, prepared to be delighted with everything, had already taken their seats. Fans fluttered, an odor as of Araby's spicy breezes was wafted through the room, a low murmur of conversation mingled with the stirring strains of the band, the lamps overhead twinkled by the dozen, and out through the wide-open windows you caught the starry night sky, the silver crescent slowly sailing up over the tall tree-tops.

A bell tinkled and the curtain went up. You saw an inn-yard, a pump and horse trough, artistically true to nature, on the sign "Scarswood Arms." Enter Boots, (Major Frankland,) a brush in one hand, a gentleman's Wellington in the other, in a state of soliloquy. He gives you to understand he is in love with Susan, the barmaid, and Fanny, the chambermaid; and in a quandary which to make Mrs. Boots. Enter Fanny—tall, dark, dashing—(Miss Hattan, the rector's daughter;) and some love passages immediately ensued. Boots is on the point of proposing to the chambermaid, when there comes a shrill call for "Fanny," and *exit* Fanny with a last coquettish toss of her long black ringlets, a last coquettish flash of her bonny black eyes. Yes, Boots likes Fanny best—will propose to Fanny, when *enter* Susan, the barmaid. Barmaids have been bewitching from time immemorial—this barmaid is too fascinating to tell. She is very blonde—with a wig of golden hair, a complexion of paint and pearl powder—a very short skirt of rose silk, a bodice of black velvet, and a perfectly heart-breaking little cap of rose-colored ribbon and point-lace. Barmaid costume the wide world over. Enter Susan (Lady Dangerfield), tripping jauntily forward, bearing a tray of tumblers, and blithely singing a little song.

Boots' allegiance is shaken. "'Tother one was pretty," he says, "but this one caps the globe. And then she have a pretty penny in Castleford bank, too." More love passages take place. Susan is coy,—shrieks and skirmishes. Down falls the tray, smash goes the glass. Boots must have that kiss—struggles for it manfully—gets that kiss—(it sounded very real too)—Susan slaps his face;—not irretrievably offended, though, you can see, and—"Susan! Susan," bawls a loud bass voice. "Coming, ma! am, coming!" Susan answers, shakes her blonde ringlets at gallant Boots, shows her white teeth, and *exit*.

Boots is alone. Boots soliloquizes once more. "How happy could I be with either, were 'tother dear charmer away."

His quandary has returned—he cannot make up his mind. If he marries Fanny he will hanker after Susan, if he marries Susan, he will break his heart for Fanny. "Oh, why can't a man marry both—both—both?" Boots asks with a melancholy howl. He plunges his deeply rouged face into the snowy folds of a scented cambric handkerchief, and sinks down, a statue of despair, still feebly murmuring: "Both—both—both!" The curtain falls to slow and solemn music. "First syllable!" shouts an invisible voice. People put their heads together, and wonder if the first syllable is not—"*Both.*"

The bell tinkles, and the curtain goes up again. This time it is an Eastern scene. A large painting of an oasis in the desert is hung in the background. A group of Bedouins hover aloof in the distance, A huge marble basin filled with gold-fish occupies the center, and in sandals and turban, an Eastern dignitary sits near. The Eastern dignitary is Sir Arthur Tregenna, his face darkened, his fair hair hidden by his gorgeous turban. An Eastern damsel approaches, a scarlet sash round about her waist, her loose hair flowing, her beautiful bare arms upholding a stone pitcher on her head. She salaams before my lord the dignitary, lets down her pitcher into the marble well, and humbly offers my lord to drink. The band plays a march. "Second syllable!" shouts the invisible voice, and the curtain goes down.

It rises again—to stirring strains this time—the band plays "The Gathering of the Clans." You are in "marble halls," pillars, curtains—and a great deal of tartan drapery. Enter a majestic figure in court attire. (Major Frankland again.) His military legs look to advantage in flesh-colored tights, his military figure is striking in velvet doublet, cloak, and rapier, his military head in a plumed cap. He is a Scotchman, for he wears a tartan sash, and his plumed cap is a Scotch bonnet. His mustaches and whiskers are jetty black—his complexion is bronzed. He is in love again, and soliloquizing—this time in a very transport of passion. He loves some bright particular star far above his reach, and apostrophizes her with his rapier in his hand, and his eyes fixed on the chandelier. Come what may, sooner or later, he is determined to win her, though his path to her heart lie through carnage and blood. The major pronounces it "bel—lud." He gnashes his expensive teeth, and glares more ferociously than ever at the chandelier. In the

distance he espies another court gallant in brave attire, and more tartan sash. The sight brings forth a perfect howl of jealous fury. He apostrophizes this distant cavalier as "Henry Stuart, Lord of Darnley, Duke of Albany, and King of Scotland." The audience have evidently got among royal company.

The warlike strains of the band change to a soft, sweet Scotch air. In the distance you hear musical feminine laughter and talking—it comes nearer. A sweet voice is singing—the Castleford brass band play the accompaniment very low and sweet. The dark gentleman in the rapier and doublet staggers back apace, says in a whisper audible all over the room, "'Tis *she!*" The queen approaches with her three Maries. The sweet voice comes nearer; you catch the words of the queen's own song of the "Four Maries."

"They reveled through the summer night,
And by day made lance shafts flee,
For Mary Beatoun, Mary Seatoun,
Mary Fleming, and *me!*"

and with the last word Mary Stuart enters, her three Maries behind her.

She looks lovely. It is Lady Cecil Clive, in trailing, jewel-studded robe of velvet, the little pointed Mary Stuart cap, with its double row of pearls and a diamond flashing in the center, stomacher, dotted with seed-pearls, ruffle, enormous farthingale. She is smiling—she is exquisite—she holds out her hands with "Ah! my lord of Bothwell and Hailes, *you* here, and listening to our poor song?" The noble doffs his plumed cap, sinks gracefully down on one knee, and lifts the fair hand to his lips. Tableau! Lively music—still very Scotch. "My queen—*La Reine Blanche*," he murmurs. The audience applaud. It is very pretty, Black Bothwell and the White Queen, and the three Maries striking an attitude in the background.

Of course the word is "*Bothwell;*" a child could guess it.

Another charade followed, then came a number of tableaux. In one of these Miss Herncastle appeared—in only one; and then by her own request and at the solicitation of Lady Cecil. The tableau was "Charlotte Corday and the Friend of the People." Sir Peter Dangerfield in the rôle of Marat.

The curtain went up. You saw an elegant apartment, a bath in the center, and in the bath the bloodthirsty monster who ruled fair France. A desk is placed across the tub; he writes as he sits in his bath; he signs death-warrants by the

dozen, and gloats with hellish exultation over his work. There is an altercation without—some one insists upon seeing him. The door slowly opens, some one slowly enters, the lights go slowly down, semi-darkness rules the scene, the band plays the awful music of Don Giovanni before the statue enters. A tall female figure glides in, in a trailing black robe ; she glides slowly forward—slowly, slowly. Her face, deadly pale, turns to the audience a moment. Clutched in the folds of that sable, sweeping robe, you see a long, slender, gleaming dagger. The silence of awe and expectation falls upon the audience. She glides nearer, nearer ; she lifts the dagger, her pale face awful, vengeful in the dim light. The Friend of the People looks up for the first time, but it is too late. The Avenger is almost upon him, the gleaming dagger is uplifted to strike. Sir Peter Dangerfield beholds the terrible face of Miss Herncastle ; he sees the brandished knife, and leaps up with a shriek of terror that rings through the house. A thrill of horror goes through every one as the curtain rapidly falls.

"Good Heaven ! she has killed him !" an excited voice says.

Then the lights flash up, the band crashes out the "Guards' Waltz ;" but for a moment neither lights nor music can overcome the spell that has fallen upon them.

"Who *was* that?" everybody asks—"who played Charlotte Corday ?"

And everybody feels a second shock, this time of disappointment, as the answer is:

"Only Lady Dangerfield's nursery governess."

Behind the scenes the sensation was greater. Pale, affrighted, Sir Peter had rushed off, and into the midst of the actors.

"How dare you send that woman to me?" he cried, trembling with rage and excitement. "Why did you not tell me that she was selected to play with me ?"

The well-bred crowd stared. Had Sir Peter gone mad? They looked at Lady Dangerfield, pale with anger and mortification—at Lady Cecil, distressed and striving to explain, and at Miss Herncastle herself—standing calm, motionless, self-possessed as ever.

They quieted him in some way, but he threw off his Marat robe and left the assembly in disgust. Miss Herncastle would have followed, but Lady Cecil, her gentle eyes quite flashing, forbade it.

"Nonsense, Miss Herncastle ! Because Sir Peter chooses to be a hysterical goose, is that any reason you should suffe.

for his folly? You acted splendidly—splendidly, I say—you are a born actress. I really thought for a moment you had stabbed him! You shall not go up and mope in your room—you shall stay and see the play played out. Sir Arthur, amuse Miss Herncastle while I dress for the tableau of Rebecca and Rowena."

Sir Arthur obeyed with a smile, at the pretty peremptory command. He was strangely struck with this tall, majestic young woman, who looked as an exiled queen might, who spoke in a voice that was as the music of the spheres, and who was only a nursery governess. She had produced as profound an impression upon him as upon the others, by her vividly powerful acting. Charlotte Corday herself could never have looked one whit more stern and terrible, with the uplifted knife over the doomed head of the tyrant, than had Miss Herncastle.

"Her Majesty, *La Reine Blanche*, commands but to be obeyed," he said with a smile. "Permit me to lead you to a seat, Miss Herncastle, and allow me to indorse Lady Cecil's words. You are a born actress."

She smiled a little, and accepted his proffered arm. Some of the ladies shrugged their shoulders and exchanged glances. A baronet and a governess! He led her to a seat in the theater, and remained by her side until the performance ended.

They talked commonplaces, of course—discussed the different tableaux and the different actors; and when the last tableau was applauded and the curtain fell upon the finale, he drew her hand within his arm once more, and was her escort back to the drawing-room. Dancing followed. As has been said, the baronet did not dance. He led Miss Herncastle to a seat and took another beside her. What was it that interested him in her, he wondered—he *was* interested, strangely. Not her beauty—she was in no way beautiful; not her conversation, for she had said very little. But she was clever—he could see that; and what wonderful eyes she had—bright, deep, solemn. How her soft, slumbrous accents pleased and lingered on the ear. She was dressed in white to-night—in dead white, without jewel or ribbon. Her abundant black hair was braided and twined like a coronet around her head—in its blackness a cluster of scarlet fuchsias shone. He had once seen a picture of Semiramis, Queen of Assyria, in a robe of white, and with blood-red roses wreathing her black hair. And to-night Miss Herncastle, the nursery governess, looked like Queen Semiramis.

She was turning over a book of engravings, and paused over the first, with a smile on her face.

"What is it?" Sir Arthur asked. "Your engraving seems to interest you. It is very pretty. What do you call it?"

"It is 'King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid,' and it *does* amuse me. Look at the Beggar Maid—see what a charming short dress she has on! look at the flowers in her flowing hair! look at the perfect arms and hands! What a pity the beggar-maids of everyday life can't look pretty and picturesque like this! But then if pictures, and poets, and books represented life as life really is, the charm would be gone. We can excuse Cophetua for falling in love with that exquisite Greek profile, that haughty, high-bred face. Notice how much more elegant she is than those scandalized ladies-in-waiting in the background. 'This beggar-maid shall be my queen!' the enraptured king is saying, and really for such a face one can almost excuse him."

Sir Arthur smiled.

"*Almost* excuse him! I confess I can't perceive the 'almost.' Why should he not make her Queen Cophetua, if he wills? She is beautiful, and graceful, and young, and good."

"And a beggar-maid. The beauty of a Venus Celestes, the grace of a bayadere, the goodness of an angel, would not counterbalance that. Kingly eagles don't mate with birds of paradise, be their plumage never so bright. And beggar maids have Grecian noses, and exquisite hands, and willowy figures in—pictures, and nowhere else. In real life their noses are of the genus pug, their fingers stumpy and grimy, their figures stout and strong, and they talk with a horrid cockney accent and drop their h's. No, these things happen in a laureate's poems—in life, never."

"Where did you get your cynicisms, Miss Herncastle? Who could have thought a young lady could be so hard and practical?"

"A young lady! nay, a governess. All the difference in the world, Sir Arthur. A world all sunshine and *couleur de rose* to —well—an earl's daughter, say—looks a very gloomy and gruesome place seen through a governess's green spectacles."

She laughed a little as she turned the book over. Sir Arthur stroked his long, fair beard and wondered what manner of woman this was.

"How bitterly she talks," he thought; "and she looks like a person who has seen trouble. I wonder what her life can have been?"

He was puzzled, interested—a dangerous beginning. He

lingered by her side nearly the whole evening. Lady Dangerfield looked on in surprise and indignation. Such unwarrantable presumption on Miss Herncastle's part, such ridiculous attention on that of Sir Arthur.

"Queenie, do you see?" she said, half angrily; "there is that forward creature, the governess, actually monopolizing Sir Arthur the whole night. What does it mean? And you look as though you didn't care."

Lady Cecil laughed and fluttered her fan. There was a deep permanent flush on her cheek to-night, a light in the brown eyes that rarely came. She looked quite dazzling.

"I *don't* care, Lady Dangerfield. Miss Herncastle may monopolize him until doomsday if she chooses. What it means is this—I asked Sir Arthur in the green-room, two hours ago, to amuse her, and he is only obeying orders. Upon my word, Ginevra, I think he is really enjoying himself for the first time since his arrival. See how interested and well pleased he looks. You ought to feel grateful to Miss Herncastle for entertaining so well your most distinguished guest. I always thought she was a clever woman—now I feel sure of it. What a pity she isn't an earl's daughter—she is just the woman of all women he ought to marry. Don't interrupt, I beg, Ginevra; let poor Sir Arthur be happy in his own way."

She laughed again and floated away. She was brilliant beyond expression to-night—some hidden excitement surely sent that red to her cheeks, that fire to her eyes. Lady Dangerfield, too, had her little excitement, for the preserver of her life had been found and was actually now in the rooms.

He had entered some hours ago with the earl, and taken his place among the audience. He had applauded the Bothwell scene, and watched *La Reine Blanche* with cool, critical eyes. She was very beautiful, but she did not seem to dazzle him. Like all the rest, the "Charlotte Corday" tableau had struck him most.

"The deuce," he muttered under his breath, as he looked at her; "who the dickens is it that lady reminds me of?"

He could not place her, and as she did not appear again, he speedily forgot her. He went with the earl into the ballroom, the cynosure of many pairs of bright eyes. The tall, soldierly figure, the dashing trooper-swing, the dark face, with its bronzed skin, its auburn beard and mustache, its keen blue eyes, looking nearly black under their black brows and lashes, the stately poise of the head, would have commanded attention anywhere

It was the gentleman who had come to the rescue of the boating party, and whom Lord Ruysland had "met by chance the usual way," and insisted upon accompanying him home.

"My good fellow," he had said pathetically, "you *must* come. Lady Dangerfield has had an adventure for the first time—you are the hero of that adventure. She overflows with romantic gratitude. She would never forgive me if I did not fetch you—she is dying to know the preserver of her life. What are you laughing at? Come and be thanked."

The tall soldier had come, and was presented in due form to my lady. He *was* thanked. My lady's expressions of gratitude were eloquent and flowing—her rescuer was better looking, even than she had supposed at first glance—*very* much better looking than Major Frankland. The gentleman listened, stroked his mustache, and looked bored. The earl glanced around. His niece's fickle fancy was caught once again—Frankland had found a rival.

"And now, my dear," he said blandly, "before you quite overpower my poor friend, I think I'll take him to Cecil. They are quite old friends, I assure you, and she will be delighted to meet him once more."

They crossed to where she stood, the center of a gay, brilliant group. She wore the Mary Stuart dress and cap once more, and looked lovely. In the midst of her laughing repartee her father's voice fell on her ear:

"Queenie, turn round and greet an old friend." Another voice spoke—a deep manly tone:

"Six years is a long time to hope for remembrance, but I trust even six years has not made *La Reine Blanche* forget the humblest of her subjects."

The laughing words died on her lips. A sort of stillness came over her from head to foot. She turned round and stood face to face with Captain Redmond O'Donnell.

## CHAPTER IX.

### SIX YEARS BEFORE.

AND is it the road to Torryglin their honors is axin afther? Arrah! get out o' me road, Murty, an' I'll spake to the quality meself. Torryglin is it, yer honor's spakin' av?" said Mr. Timothy Cronin, landlord of the popular shebeen, "*The Little Dhudeen*," in the town of Ballynahaggart, County Fermanagh, Ireland, pulling off his *caubeen* and making the quality a low bow.

The Earl of Ruysland and his daughter sat in their saddles before the door. It was drawing near the close of a cloudy, chill, autumn afternoon. The wind was rising to a steady gale, and overhead spread a dark, fast-drifting, threatening sky.

"Yes, Torryglen," his lordship answered, impatiently; "how many miles between this and Torryglen, my good fellow?"

"Six, av yer honor takes the road—three, maybe not so much, av ye take the mountains."

"The mountains—but I don't know—"

"Shure, ye can't go asthray—it's as straight as the nose on yer honor's face. Crass the Glin there beyant—the path's before ye so plain a blind man cudn't miss it. Thin turn to the right and crass the sthrame, whin ye get to Torrybahm-an ——"

"But, my good man," cried the earl, still more impatiently, "I don't know your confounded 'sthrames' or 'Torrybahms,' and we'll go astray to a dead certainty if we take this winding bridle-path you speak of. The mountain lakes and streams are flooded beside, they told me in Enniskillen—the way you speak of may be shorter but dangerous."

"Sorra danger!" said Timothy Cronin, disdainfully. "Yer bastes will take it in the clappin' av yer hands. But if yer afeered, yer honor—an' shure it 'ud be a thousand pities to have the purty young lady beside ye belated, sure there's a dacent boy here that'll convoy ye a piece o' the road an' welcome. Mickey—Mickey avic—come here!"

Mickey came—the "dacent boy" of Mr. Cronin's eulogy—a stripling of perhaps five-and-forty summers. Mickey was smoking a little black pipe, and gave his forelock a pull of respect to the gentry.

"This is Mickey, yer honor—Micky McGuiggan—as soople a boy as any in the town lan'; knows ivery fut av the road

bether thin his prayers, an' goes over it aftener. It's Torryglin that's wantin', Mickey—an' shure this is the lord himself—an' ye'll take thim acrass the hills and Torrybahm afore night fall, an' good luck to ye."

"Come on then, my man," the earl said to Mickey, and flinging the landlord of the "*Little Dhudeen*" a crown for his civility, the guide, barefooted, his pipe still in his mouth, skipped ahead with the fleet-footed rapidity of a peasant born and bred on the spot, the two equestrians following at a tolerable pace."

The scenery was wild and picturesque. Here and there a thatched cabin, with its little potato garden—the only sign of human habitation—purple and russet moorland, towering cliffs, and black beetling rocks. Away in the distance the roar of mountain torrents, swollen by recent heavy rains, and over their heads that black, heavily drifting sky, threatening another downpour.

"By Heaven! Cecil," the earl exclaimed, looking upward at the frowning canopy, "the storm will be upon us before we reach Torryglen yet. What a fool I was not to remain at Enniskillen, until to-morrow."

"Only three miles, he said, papa, and we have surely ridden one of them already. As for the storm, a wet jacket won't hurt either of us, and I suppose they will give us a good fire and a hot dinner when we reach the house."

"Divil fear thim but they will!" muttered Mr. McGuiggan, ahead, "sorra hate I'm towld thim English does but ate and dhrink. Lashins o' whiskey every hour in the twinty-four av' they plase, an' beef and mutton ivery day av' their lives, Fridays, an' all. An' it's the lord himself I'm conveyin' and his daughter; troth, but she's a purty craythur, too."

"Papa," Lady Cecil said wistfully, "is it possible people really live, and eat and sleep in these wretched hovels? I have seen poverty before, but never such poverty as this."

"They are little better than savages, my dear, and as might be expected, live in a semi-savage state. The scenery is wild enough and grand enough at least. Look at those black beetling cliffs crowned with arbutis and holly. If we were artists Queenie, we might paint this, and immortalize ourselves."

"The storm is coming," Lady Cecil cried, as a great drop splashed upon her upturned face, and the hills shook with the sullen roar of distant thunder. "You were right, we are in for a wetting after all."

"How many miles to Torryglen *now*, my man?" the earl called anxiously.

"Betther then wan an' a half," responded their guide; 'an' troth ye'll ketch it! D'ye hear that roar? That's the mountain lakes spoutin, an' whin they do that, be me word, there's danger in crassin the sthrame. An' ye must crass it to get to Torryglin this night. A chile cud do it dhry shod in the hate o' summer, but now—bedad! I hope your bastes is good shwimmers, or ye'll river see the other side. There's a current there that wud carry an army o' men over, an' a fall to back it thirty feet deep."

"Then what the devil!" cried the earl angrily, "did that rascally landlord mean by saying there was no danger, and recommending this way? Why did he not permit us to take the high road as we intended? It might have been longer perhaps, but at least it would have been safe."

"Faix, that's true for yer honor. Shure a short cut anywhere's always the longest way in the ind. Troth, meself's thinkin' the high-road wud have been the shortest cut this blissid night. And there's the sthrame for ye now, and be gomenties, it's roarin' like mad!"

Mr. McGuiggan paused—Lord Ruysland and Lady Cecil drew up their horses aghast. A foaming torrent crossed their path swollen to the width of a river, rushing over the rocks with the fury of a cataract, and plunging wildly over a precipice thirty yards distant.

"There it is for ye," said Mickey, stolidly; "an' if ye're afeerd to cross, troth there's nothin' for it but jist turn roun' and ride back to Ballynahaggart. An' meself's thinkin', conshideren' the bewtiful young lady yer lordship has wid ye, it 'ud be the wisest thing ye cud do. Shure ye'll be dhrowned intirely, wid the rain and the lightnin, except in case that yer horses can shwim it. An' faix meself has doubts av that same."

The rain was falling now in drenching torrents, the roar of the thunder and rushing waters commingled in a dread diapason; "from crag to crag the living lightning leaped;" and before them, barring farther progress, poured madly by the rushing, furious river.

"What *shall* we do, Cecil?" the earl asked, with the calm intensity of despair.

"I don't know, papa," Lady Cecil responded; and in spite of the danger and disagreeableness generally, there was a smile on her lips as she watched Mr. Michael McGuiggan standing

amid all the sublime, savage grandeur of the scene and the storm, his hands in his tattered corduroy pockets, his little black pipe in his mouth, scanning the prospect with calm philosophy. "It *may* be dangerous to go on, and yet one hates to turn back."

"I'm d—d if I turn back!" muttered the earl, savagely, between his teeth. "Do you come with us, my man, or does your pilotage end here?"

"There it's for ye," responded Mickey, dogmatically, nodding toward the river; "take it or lave it, but sorra shooaside will I commit this night. Av yer bastes wor Irish now," looking with ineffable disdain at the thorough-breds ridden by the earl and his daughter; "but— Oh, wirra! wirra! there they go, and, av Providence hasn't said it, they'll be dhrowned afore me eyes!"

"Come on, Cecil!" the earl exclaimed; "our horses will do it, and every moment we spend here is a moment wasted."

He seized her bridle rein, and the animals plunged headlong into the flood. Lady Cecil sat her horse as though part of the animal, and grasped the reins with the strength of desperation. Both she and the earl strove to head their horses against the boiling current, but, after the first plunge, the terrified horses stood amid the seething foam as if spell-bound. Lord Ruysland, his teeth set, struck his own a savage blow with his whip. He sprang madly forward, leading the other in his wake.

"Courage, Cecil—courage!" the earl shouted. "We will ford this hell of waters yet!"

But even as he spoke, at that instant she was unseated, and with a long, wild cry was tossed like a feather in the gale down straight to that awful precipice below.

No mortal help, it seemed, could save her. Her father made frantic efforts to reach her, but in vain. Near, nearer, nearer to that frightful, hissing chasm, to be dashed to atoms on the rocks below. In the midst of the waters the earl sat his horse, white, powerless, paralyzed.

"Oh, God!" he cried, "can nothing save her?"

Yes; at the last moment a wild shout came from the opposite bank, a figure plunged headlong into the river, and headed with almost superhuman strength toward her.

"Cling to the rock for the love of God!" shouted a voice through the din of the storm.

Through the din of the storm, through her reeling senses, she heard that cry and obeyed. She caught at a rock near, and

grasped it with the tenacity of despair for a moment; another, and she was torn away, held with iron strength in the grasp of a strong arm. There was a last, desperate struggle with the surging flood—a struggle in which both she and her rescuer were nearly whirled over the chasm. Then, in the uproar and darkness, there came a lull; then the tumult of many voices in wild Irish shouts; then she was lying on the opposite bank, drenched from head to foot, but saved from an awful death.

"Hurrah!" shouted a wild voice. "Long life to ye, Mister Redmond! Shure it's yerself is the thrue warrant for a sthrong arm and a sthout heart! Begorra! though ye war near it! Upon me sowl, there isn't another man in the barony but yerself cud av' dun it."

"Oh, stow all that, Lanty!" answered an impatient voice, as Lady Cecil's preserver gave himself a shake like a water-dog. "I'll hold you a guinea it's the English lord and his daughter on their way to Torryglen. Were they mad, I wonder, to try and ford the torrent in this storm? See how he breasts the current—he's down—no, he's up again—now he's gained the bank. By the rock of Cashell! gallantly done—a brave beast! Lanty, if you can do anything more for them, do it. I'm off."

He bounded away in the rainy twilight with the speed of a young stag. The peasant addressed as "Lanty" looked after him.

"By the powers, but it's like ye and all yer breed, seed, and gineration, to go to the divil to save any one in disthress, and thin fly as if he were afther ye for fear ye'd get thanked. Oh, but it's meself that knows ye—father an' son—this many a day well. God save your honor kindly."

Lanty pulled off his hairy cap.

"Troth, it was a narra escape yer honor had this night, an' the young lady. Oh, thin, it's a sore heart ye'd have in yer breasht this minit av it hadn't been for the young masther."

"That gallant youth," the earl cried, flinging himself off his horse. "I never saw a braver deed, Cecil—Cecil, my darling, thank Heaven you are saved! Cecil, my dearest, are you hurt?"

He lifted the golden head and kissed the wan, wet face. In all her sixteen years of life, Lord Ruysland had never fully realized how he loved his only child before.

She had not fainted. The high courage of the peer's daughter had upheld her through all. She half raised herself now and smiled faintly.

"Not hurt, only stunned a little by the fright and the whirl of the water. And you, papa?"

"I am perfectly safe, but—good Heaven! *what* an escape it has been. In five seconds you would have been over that horrible gulf.—Why, that lad has the heart of a very lion! the most gallant thing I ever saw done. He risked his life without one thought, I verily believe. A brave lad—a brave lad. And he has, as far as I could see, the air of a gentleman, too."

Lanty overheard, and looked at his lordship with supreme disdain.

"A gintleman, is it? Faith he is that, an' divil thank him for it! Shure he's the O'Donnell—no less; an' iverybody knows the O'Donnells wor kings and princes afore the time o' Moses. Gintleman, indade! Oh, thin it's himself that is, an' his father an' his father's father afore him. Wern't they kings o' Ulsther, time out o' mind, and didn't they own ivery rood an' mile av the counthry ye're travelin' in the days o' Henry the Eighth, till himself wid his wives an' his blackguarden tuk it from thim an' besthowed it on dhirty divils like himself? My curse an' the curse o' the crows on him and thim, hot an' heavy this night!"

"Indeed," said the earl; "and who are *you*, my good fellow? A retainer of that kingly and fallen house, I take it!"

His companion gave a second polite duck of his hairy cap.

"I'm Lanty, yer honor—Lanty Lafferty, av it's plazeen to ye—called afther me grandfather on the mother's side—God be good to him, dacent man! I'm Misther Redmond's own man, an' it's proud an' happy I am to be that same."

"You like your young master, then?"

"An' why wouldn't I like him? Is there a man or baste in the County Fermanagh wudn't shed ther last dhrop for the O'Donnell. More betoken there isn't his like for a free-handed, bould-hearted gintleman from here to the wurruld's ind. But, arrah, why nade I be talkin'—sure yer honor knows for yerself."

"I do, indeed, and I honor him the more for flying to escape my gratitude. But as we are to be neighbors, I perceive, I insist upon our being friends. Tell him it is my earnest wish—that of my daughter, too—that he shall visit us, or permit us to visit him. He need not fear being overwhelmed with thanks—I feel what he has done too deeply to turn fine phrases. A brave lad and a gallant! And now, if you'll guide us to Torryglen, my good fellow, you'll do us a last great service."

"I'll do that wid all the 'veins,'" cried Lanty Lafferty; "it's

no distance in life from this. Faix, it ud be a thousand pities av the purty crathur beside ye got cowld, for, upon my conscience, it's more like an angel she is than a young woman."

Torryglen lay nestling in a green hollow amid the rugged hills and waving wealth of gorse and heather. A trim little cottage set in the center of a flower garden, and fitted up within and without with every comfort and elegance. The earl's valet and Lady Cecil's maid had gone on in advance, and glorious peat fires, dry garments, and a savory dinner awaited them. For Lanty Lafferty, he was regaled in the kitchen, and when, hours after, he sought out his young master, he was glowing and flowing over with praises of "the lord" and his daughter.

"Oh, the darlin' o' the worruld! Wid a face like roses an' new milk, an' two eyes av her own that ud warm the very cockles av' yer heart only to look at, an' hair for all iver ye seen like a cup of coffee!"

"Coffee, Lanty?"

"Ay, coffee—an' wirra! but it's little av' the same we get in this house. Shure I had a beautiful cup over there beyant an hour ago. Like coffee—not too sthrong, mind—an' with jist a notion o' crame. That's its color; an', musha, but it's as purty a color as ye'll find in a day's walk. An' whin she looks up at ye—like this now—out of the tail av' her eye, an' wid a shmile on her beautiful face—oh, tare an' ages! av' it wudn't make an ould man young only to look at her!"

The young O'Donnell laughed. He was lying at full length on the oak floor—before the blazing peat fire—in one of the few habitable rooms that remained of what had once been the "Castle of the O'Donnell." He had not troubled himself to remove his wet clothes—he lay there steaming unconcernedly before the blaze—a book at his side, the "Iliad;"—a superb specimen of youth, and strength, and handsome health.

"She appears to have made an impression upon you, Lanty. So she is as handsome as this, is she? I thought so myself, but wasn't sure, and I hadn't time to take a second look before his lordship rode up, and I made off."

"An' wudn't it have been more reasonable, now, and more Christian-like, to have stood yer ground? Whin an O'Donnell niver run away *from* danger, arrah! Where's the sinse av' phowderin' away like mad *afther* it? Shure he wanted to thank ye, and so did the illigant young crathur hersilf."

"The very reason I fled, Lanty. I don't want their thanks

—I don't want them, for that matter. What are they coming here for? What attraction can they find in our wild mountain district that they should risk their necks seeking Torryglen? It is to be hoped they have got enough of it by this time."

"Troth, then, masther darlin', but that ould lord's a nice, quiet, mighty civil-spoken gintleman, and he does be sayin' he wants you to call and see him, or give him an' the fair-haired colleen lave to come up here an' call on ye."

"On me—call on *me!*" The young man (he was two-and-twenty or thereabouts) looked up with a short laugh. "Oh, yes, let him visit O'Donnell Castle, by all means. See that the purple drawing-room is swept and dusted, Lanty, and the cobwebs brushed from the walls, and the three years' grime and soot washed from the windows. See that the footmen wear their best liveries and put on their brogues for the occasion. Come up here! Upon my life, this lord's daughter will be enchanted with the splendors of Castle O'Donnell. Lanty, if they do happen to call, which isn't likely—and if I happen to be in, which also isn't likely—tell them I'm up in the mountains, or in the moon; that I've gone to Ballynahaggart, or—the devil—that I'm dead and buried, if you like. I won't see them. Now be off."

And then Mr. Redmond O'Donnell went back to the sounding hexameters of his "Iliad," and tried in poetry to forget; but the fair pale face of the earl's daughter arose between him and the page—wet, wild, woful, as he had seen it, with the fair streaming hair, the light, slender form, that he had clutched from the very hand of death. And she was coming, this haughty, high-born, high-bred English patrician, to behold the squalor, and the poverty, and the misery of this heap of ruin called O'Donnell Castle, to make a scoff and a wonder of Irish poverty and fallen Irish fortunes.

"I'll not see them," the youth resolved, his handsome, boyish, open face settling into a look of sullen determination. "I don't want their visit or their thanks. I'll be off up the mountains to-morrow, and stay there until this fine English lord and his daughter leave, which will be before long, I'm thinking. A week or two in this savage district will suffice for them."

But still the fair face haunted him—the novelty of such a neighbor was not to be got over. He flung the Iliad away at length, and going out on the grassy plateau, looked down the valley to where the cottage lights twinkled, far and faint, two miles off. And from *her* chamber window, ere she went to bed,

Lady Cecil Clive gazed up at the starlit sky, and the ruined towers of what had once been a great and mighty stronghold. The storm had spent its fury and passed, the autumn stars, large and white, shone out, the fresh hillside wind blew down in her fair wistful face. It was a sad fate, she thought—the last scion of a kingly and beggared race, brave as a lion and penniless as a pauper, dwelling alone in that ruined pile, and wasting his youth and best years amid the wilds of this ruined land.

"Poor fellow!" Lady Cecil thought. "So young and so utterly friendless!—too proud to labor, and too poor to live as a gentleman—wasting his life in these savage ruins! Papa must do something for him when we return to England. He saved my life at the risk of his own, and so heavy a debt of gratitude as that must be paid."

---

## CHAPTER X.

### AN IRISH IDYL.

ON very small things hinge very great events.

A horse minus a shoe changed the whole course of Redmond O'Donnell's life—altered his entire destiny. He neither went to the mountains nor the moon, to Ballynahaggart nor the—dark majesty of the Inferno. He staid at home, and he saw the Earl of Ruysland and the Lady Cecil Clive.

It happened thus: Going to the stables next morning to saddle his favorite mare, Kathleen, he found her in need of the blacksmith's services. Lanty led her off, and returning to the house, the young O'Donnell came face to face with his English visitors.

He stood for a moment mute with surprise and chagrin. He had not dreamed in the remotest way of their coming so soon, or so early, and—here they were! Escape was impossible; they were before him; and by birth and training, by race and nature, the lad was a gentleman. He took off his cap, and the young mountaineer bowed to the earl's daughter like a prince. Lord Ruysland advanced with extended hand and his sweetest smile

"Ah, Mr. O'Donnell, you fled ingloriously before me yesterday—not like an O'Donnell, by the bye, to fly even from gratitude. No—don't look so alarmed—nobody is going to thank you. You saved my daughter's life at the imminent risk of your own—a mere trifle, not worth mentioning. Cecil, my dear, come and shake hands with our young hero of yesterday—ah, I beg pardon! I promised to call no names. Mr. Redmond O'Donnell, Lady Cecil Clive."

And then two large, soft eyes of "liquid light" looked up into his, a little gray-gloved hand was given, a little, soft, low voice murmured something—poor Mr. Redmond O'Donnell never knew what—and from that moment his doom was sealed. Sudden, perhaps; but then this young man was an Irishman—everything is said in that.

He flung open the half-hingeless, wholly lockless front door, and led the way, with some half-laughing apology for the tumble-down state of O'Donnell Castle.

"Don't blame us, Lord Ruysland," the young man said, half-gayly, half-sadly; "blame your own countrymen and confiscation. We were an improvident race, perhaps, but when they took our lands and our country from us, we let the little they left go to rack and ruin. When a man loses a hundred thousand pounds or so, it doesn't seem worth his while to hoard very carefully the dozen or so of shillings remaining. Lady Cecil, will you take this seat? We can give you a fine view, at least, from our windows, if we can give you nothing else."

The earl and his daughter were loud in their praises. It *was* fine. Miles of violet and purple heather, here and there touched with golden, green, or rosy tinges, blue hills melting into the bluer sky, and deepest blue of all, the wide sea, spreading miles away, sparkling in the sunshine as if sown with stars.

They remained nearly an hour. The young seigneur of this ruined castle conducted them to the gates—nay, to the two huge buttresses, where gates once had been—and stood, cap in hand, watching them depart. And so, with the sunshine on his handsome, tanned face, on his uncovered, tall head, Lady Cecil bore away the image of Redmond O'Donnell.

You know this story before I tell it. She was sixteen years of age—he had saved her life, risking his own to save it, without a moment's thought, and like a true woman, she adored bravery almost above all other things in man. She pitied him unspeakably, so proud, so poor, so noble of birth and ancestry, a descendant of kings, and a pauper. And he had an eye like

an eagle, a voice tender and spirited together, and a smile—a smile, Lady Cecil thought, bright as the sunshine on yonder Ulster hills. It was love at first sight—boy and girl love, of course; and the Earl of Ruysland, shrewd old worldling that he was, might have known it very well if he had given the subject one thought. But he did not. He was a great deal too absorbed in his own personal concerns about this time to have much solicitude about his little daughter's *affaires du cœur*. Lady Cecil had pitied Redmond O'Donnell for being a pauper, without in the least dreaming she was one herself. Through no fancy for the country, through no desire to ameliorate the condition of the inhabitants, had my lord come to Ireland. Grim poverty had driven him hither, and was likely to keep him here for some time to come.

His life had been one long round of pleasure and excess, of luxury and extravagance. He had come into a fortune when he attained his majority, and squandered it. He came into another when he married his wealthy wife, and squandered that, too. Now he was over head and ears in debt. Clive Court was mortgaged past all redemption—in flight was his only safety; and he fled—to Ireland. There was that little hunting-box of his among the Ulster hills—Torryglen; he could have that made habitable, and go there, and rough it until the storm blew over. Roughing it himself, he did not so much mind. "Roughing it," in his phraseology, meaning a valet to wait upon him, all the elegancies of his life transported from his Belgravian lodgings, and a first-rate cook—but there was his daughter. For the first time in her sixteen years of life she was thrown upon his hands. At her birth, and her mother's death, she had been placed out at nurse; at the age of three, a cousin of her mother's, living in Paris, had taken her, and brought her up. Brought her up on strictly French principles—taught her that love and courtship, as English girls understand them, are indelicate, criminal almost; that for the present she must attend to her books, her music, her drawing, and embroidery, and that when the proper time came, she would receive her husband as she did her jewelry and dresses—from the hand of papa. Papa came to see her tolerably often, took her with him once in a while when he visited his friend and crony, Sir John Tregenna; and she was told if she were a good girl she should one day, when properly grown up, marry young Arthur and be Lady Tregenna herself, and queen it in this old sea-girt Cornish castle. And little Cecil always

laughed and dimpled, and danced away and thought no more about it. She had seen very little of Arthur Tregenna—she was somewhat in awe of him, as has been said. He was so grave, so wise, so learned, and she was such a frivolous little butterfly, dancing in the sunshine, eating bonbons, and singing from morning till night.

Her first grief was the death of the kind Gallicized English woman who had been her second mother. Her father, on the eve of his Irish exile, went to Paris, brought her with him, and her old bonny Thérèse, and for the first time in her life, little Lady Cecil met with an adventure, and became a heroine.

"I wonder if he will call upon us!" she thought now, as she walked homeward through the soft autumn noonday—the personal pronoun of course having reference to the young O'Donnell. "He did not really promise, but I think—I think he looked as though he would like to come. It would be pleasant to have some one to talk to, when papa is away, and he tells me he will be away a great deal at Bally—the town with the unpronounceable Irish name. How very, very poor he seems; his jacket was quite shabby; his whole dress like that of the peasantry. And such a tumble-down place—only fit for owls, and bats, and rooks. Papa (aloud), you have a great deal of influence, and many friends in England—could you do nothing for this Mr. O'Donnell? He seems so dreadfully poor, papa."

The earl shrugged his shoulders and laughed. "My little, unsophisticated Cecil! A great deal of influence and many friends! My dear, I have not influence enough to keep myself out of the bankrupt court, nor friends enough to enable me to stay in England. Do you think I would come to this confounded, half-civilized land, if I could stay away? Poor, indeed! Your Mr. O'Donnell isn't half as poor as I am, for at least I suppose he isn't very deeply in debt."

His daughter looked at him in sheer surprise. "And you are, papa? *You* poor? Poor!" she tried to comprehend it, shook her head, and gave it up. "I always thought you were rich, papa—I always thought English peers had more money than they knew what to do with. How can we be poor—with servants, and horses, and plate, and—"

"One must have the necessities of life, child," her father broke in impatiently, "as long as they *are* living. One can't go back to primitive days, and live in a wigwam, or in a rickety rookery like that. I wish to Heaven one could—I'd try it. I

tell you I haven't a farthing in the world—you may as well learn it now as later; and have more debts than I can ever pay off from now to the crack of doom. I don't want to pay. While I'm in hiding here I'll try to compromise in some way with my confounded creditors and the Jews. Poor, indeed! By Jove! we may live and die in this Irish exile, for what I see," the earl said with a sort of groan.

A little smile dimpled Lady Cecil's rose-bud face, a happy light shone in her gold-brown eyes. She glanced at the little cottage nestling in its green cup, myrtle and clematis climbing over it, at the fair fields, daisy spangled, at the glowing uplands in their purple dress, at the rugged towers of the old castle boldly outlined against the soft sunny sky, with a face that showed to her at least the prospect of an eternal Irish exile had no terrors.

"Very well, papa," she said, dreamily; "suppose we do? It's a very pretty place, I'm sure, and if we are poor it surely will not take much to keep us here. While I have you and Thérèse and my books and piano, *I* am content to stay here forever."

Her father turned and looked at her, astonishment and disgust struggling in his face.

"Good Heaven! listen to her! Content to stay here! Yes, and live on potatoes like the natives, and convert the skins into clothing, to go barefooted and wear striped linsey-woolsey gowns reaching below the knee, talk with a mellifluous North of Ireland accent, and end by marrying Lanty Lafferty, I suppose, or the other fellow Mickey. If you can't talk sense, Cecil, hold your tongue!"

Lady Cecil blushed and obeyed. Marry Lanty Lafferty! No, she would hardly do that. But oh, Cecil, whence that rosy blush? Whence that droop of the fair, fresh face? Whence that sudden rising in your mind of the tall figure, the bold flashing eyes of Redmond O'Donnell? Is this why the Irish exile is robbed of its terrors for you?

"No, no," the earl said, after a little, as his daughter remained silent. "We'll get out of this howling wilderness of roaring rivers, and wild young chieftains, and tumble-down castles as speedily as we can. I have one hope left, and that is—" he looked at her keenly—"in you, my dear."

"I, papa?"

"Yes; in your marriage. What's the child blushing at? In a year or two you'll be old enough, and Tregenna will be

back in England. Of course you know it has been an understood thing these many years that you were to marry him when you grew up. *He* is perfectly ready to fulfill the compact, and certainly you will be. You have been brought up in a way to understand this. Tregenna is rich, monstrously rich, and won't see his father-in-law up a tree. I give you my word he is my last hope—your marriage with him, I mean. I will try and compromise with my creditors, I say, and when things are straightened out a bit we'll go back to England. You shall be presented at court, and will make, I rather fancy, a sensation. We will let you enjoy yourself for your first season, and when it is over we will marry you comfortably to Sir Arthur Tregenna."

And Lady Cecil listened with drooping eyelids. It seemed to her all right—French girls married in this judicious way, all trouble of love-making and that nonsense being taken off their hands by kindly parents and guardians. She listened, and if she did not say so in words said in effect, with Thackeray's hero, Mr. Foker, "Very well, sir, as you like it. When you want me, please ring the bell," and then fell into thought once more, and wondered dreamily if young O'Donnell would call that evening at Torryglen.

Young O'Donnell called. The little drawing-room of the cottage was lit with waxlights, a peat fire burned on the hearth, a bright-hued carpet covered the floor, tinted paper hung the walls, and pretty sunny pictures gemmed them. It was half drawing-room, half library, one side being lined with books. A little cottage piano stood between the front windows—Lady Cecil sat at that—a writing-desk occupied the other side—his lordship sat at that. Such a contrast to the big, bare, bleak, lonesome rooms at home—their only music the scamper of the rats, the howling of the wind, and Lanty's Irish lilting.

The contrast came upon him with a pang of almost pain; the gulf between himself and these people, whose equal by birth he was, had not seemed half so sharp before. Lady Cecil, in crisp, white muslin and blue ribbons, with diamond drops in her ears and twinkling on her slim fingers, seemed as far above him as some "bright particular star," etc. He stood in the doorway for a moment irresolute, abashed, sorry he had come, ashamed of his shabby jacket and clumping boots. The earl, with pen in his hair like some clerk, looked up from his pile of papers and nodded familiarly.

"Ah, O'Donnell—how do? Come in. Been expecting you. Very busy, you see—must excuse me. Cecil will entertain you

—give him some music, my dear." And then my lord went back to his papers—bills, duns, accounts, no end—with knitted brows and absorbed mind, and forgot in half a minute such an individual as O'Donnell existed.

Redmond went over to the piano; how bright the smile of girlish pleasure with which the little lady welcomed him. "Would he sit here?—did he like music?—would he turn the pages for her?—was he fond of Moore's melodies?" In this brilliant and original way the conversation commenced.

"Yes, he liked music, and he was *very* fond of Moore's melodies. Would she please go on with that she was singing?" It was, "She was far from the land where her young hero sleeps," and the tender young voice was full of the pathos and sweetness of the beautiful song.

"He lived for his love, for his country he died," sang Lady Cecil, and glanced under her long, brown lashes at the grave, dark face beside her. "Robert Emmet must have looked like that," she thought; "he seems as though *he* could die for his country too. I suppose his ancestors have. I wish—I wish—papa could do something for him, or—Sir Arthur Tregenna."

But somehow it was unpleasant to think of Sir Arthur, and her mind shifted away from him. She finished her song, and discovered Mr. O'Donnell could sing—had a very fine and highly cultivated voice, indeed, and was used to the piano accompaniment.

"I used to sing with my sister," he explained, in answer to her involuntary look of surprise. "She plays very well."

"Your sister! why I thought—"

"I had none. Oh, yes I have—very jolly little girl Rose is, too—I rather think you would like her. I am quite sure," Mr. O'Donnell blushed a little himself as he turned this first compliment, "she would like *you*."

"And will she come here? How glad I am. Will she come soon? I am certain I shall like her."

Redmond shook his head.

"No," he said, "she will not come here at all—never, in all likelihood. She is in America—in New Orleans, living with her grandfather. A Frenchman, Lady Cecil."

"A Frenchman! *Your* sister's grandfather?"

"Yes—an odd mixture, you think," smiling. "You see, Lady Cecil, when my father was a young man, he fought in the Mexican war under General Scott. We are a fighting race, I must inform you—war is our trade. When the Mexican war

ended, he went to New Orleans, and there he met a young lady —French, and a great heiress—a beauty too, though she *was* my mother. Well, Lady Cecil, she fell in love with the dashing Irish trooper—her friends were frantic, and she eloped with him. A romantic story, is it not? He brought her here—it must have been a contrast to the luxury of her French home. Her father refused to forgive her—returned all her letters unopened, and here she lived seven years, and here she died and was buried. I'll show you her grave some day in the churchyard of Ballynahaggart. I was six—Rose one year old. Her father heard of her death—not through mine; he never wrote or held any communication with him—and he relented at last. Came all the way over here, nearly broken-hearted, and wanted to become reconciled. But my father sternly and bitterly refused. He offered to take Rose and me, and bring us up, and leave us his fortune when he died; but still he was refused. He returned to New Orleans, and three months after Father Ryan of Ballynahaggart wrote him word of my father's death. He had never held up his head after my mother's loss.

"They sent us both out there. Young as I was, I resisted —all the bitterness of my father had descended to me; but I resisted in vain. We went out to New Orleans, and now I look back upon my life there as a sort of indistinct dream or fairy tale. The warmth, the tropical beauty, and the luxuriance of my grandfather's house, come back to me in dreams sometimes, and I wake to see the rough rafters and mildewed walls of the old castle. I stayed there with him until I was nineteen, then I refused to stay longer. He had despised my father and shortened my mother's life by his cruelty—I would not stay a dependent on his bounty. It was boyish bravado, perhaps, Lady Cecil, but I felt all I said. I left New Orleans and Rose, and came here, and here I have been running wild, and becoming the savage you find me. But I like the freedom of the life in spite of its poverty; I would not exchange it for the silken indolence and luxury of Menadarva, my Louisianian home. And here I shall remain until an opportunity offers to go, as all my kith and kin have gone before me, and earn my livelihood at the point of my sword."

Lady Cecil listened. She liked all this; she liked the lad's spirit in refusing for himself that which had been refused his mother. Not good sense, perhaps, but sound chivalry.

"You will go out to India, I suppose," she said; "there always seems to be fighting there for those who want it."

The young man's brow darkened.

"India?" he said; "no. No O'Donnell ever fought under the English flag—I will not be the first. Years ago, Lady Cecil—two hundred and more—all this country you see belonged to us, and they confiscated it, and left us houseless and outlaws. The O'Donnell of that day swore a terrible oath that none of his race should ever fight for the British invader, and none of them ever have. I shall seek service under a foreign flag—it doesn't matter which, so that it is not that of *your* nation, Lady Cecil."

Lady Cecil pouted—said it was unchristian and unforgiving, but in her heart of hearts she liked it all, and wished, with Desdemona, that Heaven had made her such a man. Redmond O'Donnell lingered until the earl yawned audibly over his musty accounts, and the little ormolu clock ticked off half-past ten, and walked homeward under the moonlight and starlight, feeling that the world had suddenly beautified, and this lowly valley had become a very garden of Eden, with the sweetest Eve that ever smiled among the roses.

That first evening was but the beginning of the end. The visits, the music, the duets, reading—the walks "o'er the moor among the heather," the rides over the autumn hills, with Redmond O'Donnell for cavalier, the sketching of the old castle—the old, old, old, endless story of youth and love, told since the world began—to be told till the last trump shall sound.

Lord Ruysland saw nothing, heard nothing—was as unsuspicious as though he were not a "battered London rake" and a thorough man of the world. His impecunious state filled his mind to the exclusion of everything else, and then Cecil had been so well brought up, etc. The child must walk and ride, and must have a companion. Young O'Donnell was a beggar—literally a beggar—and of course might as well fix his foolish affections on one of her Majesty's daughters as upon that of the Earl of Ruysland.

He was awakened suddenly and unexpectedly from his dream and his delusion. Seven weeks had passed—the ides of November had come—the chill autumn blasts were whistling drearily over the mountains. He was sick and tired to death of his enforced exile; affairs had been patched up in some way, a compromise effected; he might venture to show his face once more across the Channel. In a week or two at the farthest he would start.

He sat complacently thinking this over alone in the drawing

room, when the door opened. Gregory, his man, announced "Mr. O'Donnell," and vanished.

"Ah, Redmond, my lad, glad to see you. Come in—come in. Cecil's upstairs. I'll send for her."

But Mr. O'Donnell interrupted; he did not wish Lady Cecil sent for—at least just yet. He wished to speak to the earl alone.

He was so embarrassed, so unlike himself—bold, frank, free, as he habitually was—that Lord Ruysland looked at him in surprise. That look was enough—it told him all.

"Good Heavens!" he thought, "what an ass I have been. Of course, he has fallen in love with her—arn't matrimony and murder the national pastimes of this delightful island? And very likely she has fallen in love with him—the young savage is so confoundedly good-looking."

He was right. While he sat thinking this, Redmond O'Donnell was pouring into his ear the story of his love and his hopes.

"It was his madness to worship her" (he was *very* young and inclined to hyperbole), "to adore her. He was poor, he knew, but he was young, and the world was all before him. He would wait—ay, as long as his lordship pleased—he would win a name, a fortune, a title, it might be, and lay them at her feet. One O'Donnell had done it in Spain already—what any man had done he could do. His birth, at least, was equal to hers. He asked nothing now but this: Only let him hope—let him go forth into the world and win name and fame, lay them at her feet, and claim her as his wife. He loved her—no one in this world would ever love her again better than he." And then he broke down all at once and turned away and waited for his answer.

The earl kept a grave face—it spoke volumes for his admirable training and high good breeding. He did not laugh in this wild young enthusiast's face; he did not fly into a passion; he did nothing rude or unpleasant, and he did not make a scene.

"Mr. O'Donnell's affection did his daughter much honor," he said; "certainly he was her equal, her superior, indeed, in point of birth; and as to making a name for himself, and winning a fortune, of course, there could not be a doubt as to *that* with a young man of his indomitable courage and determination. But was it possible Lady Cecil had not already told him she was engaged?"

"Engaged!" The young man could but just gasp the word, pale and wild "Engaged?"

"Most certainly—from her very childhood—to the wealthy Cornish baronet, Sir Arthur Tregenna. She had given her promise to marry him of her own free will—the wedding, in all probability, would take place upon her eighteenth birthday. Really now it was quite inexcusable of Queenie not to have mentioned this. But it was just possible—she was so very young, and Mr. O'Donnell was a man of honor—perhaps he was doing him injustice in thinking he had made a declaration to her in person?"

"No." Young O'Donnell had not. He was so white, so wild, so despairing-looking, that the earl was getting alarmed. A scene! and oh, *how* he abhorred scenes! "He had not spoken to her on the subject—he never had—he wished to obtain her father's consent first."

The earl grasped his hand with effusion.

"My lad, you're a gentleman from head to foot. I am proud of you! Have you—has she—I mean do you think your affection is returned? Oh! don't blush and look modest—it isn't the most unlikely thing on earth. Do you think Cecil returns your very—ah! 'pon my life—ardent devotion?"

Young O'Donnell stood looking handsome and modest before him.

"He did not like to say—but he hoped."

"Oh, of course you do," the earl supplemented, "and very strongly too. Well, my lad, you deserve something for the admirable and honorable manner in which you have acted, and you shall have your reward. Cecil shall wait for you if she wishes it! No, don't thank me yet; hear me out. You are to spend this evening here, are you not? Well, as you have been silent so long, be silent yet a little longer. Don't say a word to her. To-morrow morning I will lay all this before her myself, and if she prefers the penniless Irishman to the rich Cornishman, why, Heaven forbid *I* should force her affections! I can trust to you implicitly, I know, and this time to-morrow come over to see us again, and you shall have your answer."

He would not listen to the young man's ardent thanks; he pushed him good-naturedly away and arose.

"Thank me to-morrow," he said, "if Queenie prefers love in a cottage to thirty thousand a year—not before."

The sneer in his voice was imperceptible, but it was there. Half an hour after the earl sought out Gregory, his valet and manager.

"We leave at daybreak to-morrow morning, Gregory," he

said; "Lady Cecil and I. You will remain behind, pack up everything, and follow later in the day. Not a word, however, to Lady Cecil."

That evening—the last—when Redmond O'Donnell's hair is gray, I fancy it will stand out distinct from all other evenings in his life. The wax-lit drawing-room, with its gay green carpet, its sparkling fire, its pictures, its wild natural flowers, its books, its piano. Lord Ruysland, with a paper in his hand, seated in his easy chair and watching the young people covertly from over it; Lady Cecil at the piano, the candle-light streaming over her fair blonde face, her floating golden hair, her silvery silk dress, her rings and ribbons. In dreary bivouacs, in the silence and depth of African midnight, this picture came back as vividly as he saw it then. In desolate desert marches, in the fierce, hot din of battle, it flashed upon him. Lying delirious in the fever of gunshot wounds, in Algerian hospitals, it was of this night, of her as he saw her then, he raved.

She sang for him all the songs he liked best. He leaned over the piano, his eyes on that fairest face, his ears drinking in that dearest melody, silent, happy. They rarely found much to say to one another when papa was present; they had got past the talking stage, and one word and two or three looks did the business now. There was music, and silence, and bliss; and at ten o'clock it was all over, and time for him to go.

The last night! She gave him her hand shyly and wistfully at parting, and went up to her room. The earl gave him a friendly clasp.

"To-morrow," he said, with a smile, "until to-morrow, Redmond, my lad, good-night and *au revoir*."

The November wind was howling wildly through the moonlight-flooded earth and sky. He did not see this cold splendor; he saw nothing, thought of nothing now but lovely Cecil Clive.

What a night that was—what a long tossing night of joy, of hope, of fear, of longing. He did not despair—he was young and sanguine, and hope had the best of it. He *knew* she loved him; had not looks, smiles, and blushes, a thousand and one things pen and ink can never tell, assured him of it? and what to an angelic being like that was the dross of wealth, that it should stand between two devoted hearts? Thirty thousand a year—the Cornishman had that—how he hated that Cornishman! Well, thirty thousand per annum is a good round sum, but there was wealth in the world for the seeking, and the labors of Hercules were as nothing compared to what *he* was

ready to undergo for her sake. An O'Donnell had made his mark in Spain—McMahon in France—a Wellington in England—all Irishmen good and true; what they had done he would do. Yes, the Cornishman and his fortune might go *au diable*. She would be true to her love and to him; she would trust him and wait.

Next morning, lest he should be tempted to break his promise, and his feet, in spite of him, take him to the cottage, he mounted Kathleen and went galloping over the hills and far away with the first peep of sunrise. The afternoon was far advanced when he returned; the last slanting rays of the autumn sunset were streaming ruby and orange over the smiling moors as he knocked at the cottage door.

It was opened by grave, gentlemanly Mr. Gregory. Mr. Gregory in hat and greatcoat, and everywhere litter, and dust, and confusion. Carpets taken up, pictures taken down, packing cases everywhere—an exodus evidently.

He turned pale with sudden terror. What did it mean? Where was she? His heart was throbbing so fast, it seemed to stop his very breath.

"Where is Lord Ruysland?" He turned almost savagely upon Gregory, with pale face and excited eyes, but all the wild Irishmen from Derry to Connaught were not going to upset the equanimity of a well-trained English valet.

"Gone, Mr. Redmond, sir—a sudding summons, I believe it was. His lordship left about nine o'clock this morning, sir—Lady Cecil halso. Which there is a note for you, Mr. Redmond, sir, which no doubt hexplains. Wait one moment, *hif* you please, and I'll fetch it."

He never spoke a word. He leaned against the door-post, feeling sick and giddy, all things seeming in a mist. Mr. Gregory returned, the note in his hand, a look of mingled amusement and pity struggling with the national and professional gravity of a Briton and a valet. Did he suspect the truth? Most likely—servants know everything. He placed it in his hand; the young man went forward a pace or two, and the white door shut very quietly and decidedly behind him. He tore it open; it contained an inclosure. The earl had very little to say—half a dozen lines held Redmond O'Donnell's sentence of doom.

"MY DEAR BOY:—I spoke to Cecil after you left. It is as I feared—you have deceived yourself. Her promise binds her; she has no wish nor inclination to break it. And she had no idea of the state of *your* feelings.

She joins with me in thinking it best for all parties she should go at once—another meeting could be but embarrassing to both. With real regrets, and best wishes for your future, I am, my dear boy, sincerely yours,

"RUYSLAND."

The inclosed was in the slim, Italian tracery of Lady Cecil—strangely cold and heartless words.

"*Mon Ami*:—I am inexpressibly distressed. Papa has told me all. What he said to *you* is true. My promise is given and must be kept. It is best that I should go. Farewell! My eternal gratitude and *friendship* are yours.

CECIL."

Only that—so cold, so hollow, so heartless, so false! The golden sunshine, the green lime-trees, the violet heath turned black for an instant before his eyes. Then he crumpled the letters in his hand and walked away.

Mr. Gregory was watching from the window. Mr. Gregory saw him stagger like a drunken man as he walked, and, some twenty yards from the cottage, fling himself downward on the waving heath, and lie there like a stone. Mr. Gregory's masculine sympathies were touched.

"Pore young chap," he soliloquized. "Master's been and given him the slip. He's fell in love with her ladyship, and this 'ere's the hupshot. Sarves him right, of coorse—poor as a church mouse—still he's a nice young fellar, and I quite pities him. I remember 'ow I felt myself when 'Arriet Lelachur long ago jilted *me*."

He lay there for hours. The sun had set, the night, with its stars and winds, had come, when he lifted his head off his arm, and Mr. Gregory and the packing cases were miles away. His haggard eyes fell on the notes he still held, and with a fierce imprecation he tore them into atoms and scattered them far and wide.

"And so shall I tear her—false, heartless, mocking jilt—out of my life. Oh, God! to think that every smile, every word, every look was mockery and deceit—that she was fooling me from the first, and laughing at my presumptuous folly, while I thought her an angel. And *he*—while I live I'll never trust man or woman again!"

Are we not all unconsciously theatrical in the supreme hours of our lives. He was now, although there was a heart-sob in every word. And with them the boy's heart went out from Redmond O'Donnell, and never came back again.

## CHAPTER XI.

### ITS ENGLISH READING.

LADY CECIL then *was* heartless—you say, a flirt, a deceitful flirt, from first to last—luring with innocent eyes and soft, childish smile, even at sixteen, only to fling her victim away the moment her conquest was made. Wait.

She had bidden Redmond good-night. There was a tender, tremulous happiness in the soft hazel eyes that watched him out of sight, a faint half-smile on the rosy, parted lips. She scarcely knew what her new sky-bliss meant; she never thought of falling in love—was she not to marry Sir Arthur Tregenna?—only she knew she had never, never been half so happy before in all her life, and that Ireland was fairer and lovelier than the "Islands of the Blessed" themselves.

"Good-night, papa," she said, taking her candle and turning to go.

"Oh!—wait a moment, Queenie, will you?" her father said, somewhat hurriedly; "I want you to do a little copying for me before you go to bed."

"Copying?" She sat down her candle and looked at him in wonder. He did not choose to meet those large, surprised brown eyes.

"Yes, my dear. Don't look alarmed; only a line or two. Here it is. Copy it off, word for word, as I dictate."

"Write '*Mon Ami.*'"

She wrote it.

"*I am inexpressibly distressed. Papa has told me all. What he has said to you is true. My promise is given and must be kept. It is best that I should go.*" Here Lady Cecil came to a sudden, alarmed stop, and looked up with a greatly disturbed face. "Go, papa," she said; "what does all this mean?"

"Be kind enough to write on, and never mind asking questions," her father retorted, impatiently; "'best that I should go.' You have that? Go on then. '*Farewell! My eternal gratitude and friendship are yours.*' *Now* sign it '*Cecil.*' That will do. Thanks, my dear. What a very pretty hand you write, by the way."

"Papa," his daughter began, still with that disturbed face,

"whom is this written for? What does it mean? I don't understand."

"Don't you? Please don't ask too many questions—curiosity has ever been the bane of your sex. Remember Eve and Lot's wife, and be warned. Perhaps I want your autograph. Apropos of nothing," he was very busily folding the note now. "Thérèse will wake you early to-morrow morning. We start immediately after breakfast for Enniskillen."

"Enniskillen!" She said it with a sort of gasp. "Papa, are we—going away?"

He laid down the letter, and looked her full, keenly, steadily in the face. Her eyes shifted and fell under that pitiless scrutiny.

"And if we are, Queenie—what then? If I had said we were going to the antipodes you would hardly look more aghast. Your attachment to—ah, Torryglen, of course—must be *very* strong, my dear, since the thought of leaving it affects you thus."

She shrank away from his sneer as though he had struck her. Her sensitive lips quivered, her face flushed. Again she took her candle and turned to go.

"Good-night, papa." Her voice sounded husky, and the earl watched the slight, fragile figure ascending the stairs, with compressed lips and knitted brows.

"Not one second too soon," he thought. "Another week and the mischief would have been irrevocably done. Given a lonely country house, and two moderately well-looking people, thrown constantly into propinquity, a love affair invariably follows. My young friend O'Donnell, I thank you for speaking in the nick of time. You have a pride that bears no proportion to your purse or prospects, and I think those two polite little notes will effectually wind up your business."

Lady Cecil slept very little that night—a panic had seized her. Going away! did *he* know? would she see him to say good-by before she left? would they ever meet again? And that note—what did that cold, formal note mean? Whom was it for? Her cheeks were quite white, her eyes heavy, her step slow, her tones languid, when she descended to breakfast. She was already in her riding-habit, and the horses were saddled and waiting. During breakfast her eyes kept turning to the door and windows—up the valley road leading to the O'Donnell's ruined keep. Would he come? The earl saw and smiled grimly to himself.

"No, my dear," he said, inwardly. "You strain your pretty brown eyes for nothing—he will *not* come. A handsome lad and a brave, but you have looked your last upon him."

They arose from breakfast—the hour of departure had come. Then out of sheer desperation Lady Cecil gathered courage and spoke with a great gulp:

"Papa—does—does Mr. Donnell know we—" She stopped, unable to finish the sentence.

"Mr. O'Donnell," with bland urbanity, "well, I'm not quite positive whether I mentioned to him yesterday our departure or not. I shall leave him a note, however, of thanks and farewell. Of course it wasn't necessary to tell him, my dear—a very fine fellow indeed, in his sphere, and much superior to the *rest* of the peasantry—a little presumptuous, though, I fancy of late. Come, Cecil—the horses wait, and 'time is on the wing.'"

What could she say?—what could she do? There was passionate rebellion at her heart—pain, love, regret, remorse. Oh, what would he think? how basely ungrateful she would appear in his eyes. How unkind—how cruel of papa, not to have spoken last night before he left, and let them say good-by, at least. She could hardly see the familiar landscape for the passionate tears that filled her eyes. Here was the river—only a placid stream now, where he had so heroically risked his life to save hers, yonder the steep, black cliff up which he had scrambled, at the risk of his neck, to gather a cluster of holly she had longed for. There were the grim, rugged, lonely towers and buttresses of the once grand old Irish castle, there the spot where she had sat by his side hundreds of times sketching the ruins. And now they were parting without one word of farewell—parting forever!

They rode on; the tower was reached. All the way she had scarcely spoken one word—all the way she had been watching, watching vainly for him. They dined at Ballynahaggart, and started in the afternoon for Enniskillen. They made no stay—only that one night; in two days they were in London.

They remained a week in the metropolis, at the residence of a friend. The earl returning home to dinner one evening, sought out his daughter, with an interesting item of news. In Regent Street that day he had come suddenly upon whom did she think?—their young Irish friend, Redmond O'Donnell.

She had been sitting at the window looking out at the twilit

street. At the sound of that name she turned suddenly. How wan and thin she had grown in a week—how dull the bright brown eyes. Now a sudden light leaped into them—a swift, hot flush of joy swept over her face.

"Papa! Redmond! You saw him!"

"Yes, my dear," Lord Ruysland said, carelessly, "and looking very well, too. I asked him to come here—said you would be glad to see him—very sorry at having to leave Ireland without an opportunity of saying good-by, and all that—but he declined."

"He—declined!" The pale lips could but just shape the words.

"Yes, and rather discourteously, too. Said he did not mean to stay in London over a week, and that his time would be fully occupied. He did not even send you a message; he seemed filled with boyish elation over his own affairs. He is going out to Algiers, he tells me, to seek active service under the French flag. These hot-headed Irishmen are always 'spoiling for a fight.' He seemed in great spirits, and quite wild to be off. But he might have found time to call, though, all the same, I think, or even send you a message. It's 'out of sight, out of mind,' with these hare-brained sort of people, though, always. Go to the dickens to do any one a service, and forget them for good the instant they are out of their sight."

Dead silence answered him. He tried to see his daughter's face, but it was averted, and the gathering twilight hid it. He need not have feared. She had all an English girl's "pluck." Her eyes were flashing now, one little hand clenched hard, her teeth set. She had liked him so much—so much, she had not known one happy hour since they had left Ulster, for thinking of *him;* and now he was in London, and refused to come to see her—talked to her father, and would not even send his remembrances—on the eve of departure forever, it might be, and could find no time to call and say good-by. She had thought of him by day and dreamed of him by night, and he returned it—like this!

"I'll never think of him again—never!" she said, under her breath. "I am glad, glad, glad he does not dream how much I—I like him!"—a great sob here. "I'll never think of him again, if I can."

If she could! One thing is certain, she never uttered his name from that hour, and slowly the sparkle came back to her eyes, the old joyous ring to her laugh, and *La Reine Blanche*

was her own bright, glad self once more. "Love's young dream" had come and gone, had been born, and died a natural death, and was decently buried out of sight. But this also is certain—no second dream ever came to replace it. Good men and true bowed down and fell before Lord Ruysland's handsome, dark-eyed daughter; names, titles, hearts, fortunes, and coronets were laid at her feet, to be rejected. The world could not understand. What did she mean? What did she expect? She felt a sort of weary wonder, herself. Why could she not return any of this love so freely lavished upon her? Men had asked her to be their wife whose affection and name would have done honor to any woman, but she rejected them all. Many of them touched her pity and her pride—not one her heart. Her father looked on patiently, quite resigned. None of these admirers were richer than his favorite, Sir Arthur Tregenna. Sir Arthur Tregenna, when the time came, she should marry.

In all these years of conquest, and triumph, and pleasure she had heard nothing of or from her Irish hero. Long before, perhaps, his grave might have been made out yonder under the burning Arab sky; dead or alive, at least he was lost forever to her. She could even smile now as she looked back upon that pretty, poetic, foolish idyl of her first youth—smile to think what a hero he had been in her eyes—how willingly she would have given "all for love, and thought the world well lost"—smile to think what simpletons love-sick girls of sixteen are.

. . . . . .

And now six years were past, and he stood before her. Stood before her changed greatly, and yet the same. It was a superbly-soldierly figure—tall, stalwart, erect, strong but not stout—muscular, yet graceful. The fresh, beardless face of the boy she remembered she saw no longer; the face of the man was darkly bronzed by the burning Algerian sun; a most becoming, most desirable auburn beard and mustache altered the whole expression of the lower part. It had a stern, something of a tired look, the lips a cynical curve, the blue eyes a keen, hard light, very different from their old honest simplicity and frankness. No; this bronzed, bearded, Algerian chasseur was not the Redmond O'Donnell she had known and liked so well, any more than she was the blushing, tender heart of six years ago.

She stood for an instant looking at him. The surprise of seeing him *here*, as suddenly as though he had risen up out of the earth, almost took her breath away. But for the Lady

Cecil Clive to lose her self-possession long was not possible. A second later, and she held out her hand to him with a smile and glanced as bright, as frank, as pleasant as any that had ever been given him by the Lady Cecil of Torryglen.

"It is—it is Captain O'Donnell. And after all those years! And so changed by time, and whiskers, and Algerian campaigning, that I may well be pardoned for doubting his identity."

He bowed with a smile over the little hand a brief instant, then resigned it.

"Changed, no doubt—and not for the better; grown old, and gray, and grim. And you, too, have changed, Lady Cecil—it might seem like flattery if I told you how greatly. And yet I think I should have known you anywhere."

"Queenie has grown tall, and doesn't blush quite so often as she used at Torryglen," her father interposed. "You have had many hair-breadth escapes by flood and field since we saw you last, but I don't think you ever had a narrower one than that evening when we saw you first. Oh, well—perhaps excepting yesterday at the picnic."

Captain O'Donnell laughed—the old, pleasant, mellow laugh of long ago—and showed very white teeth behind his big trooper's mustache,

"Yes, the risk was imminent yesterday; my nerves have hardly yet recovered the shock of that—tempest in a teapot. I am glad to find the lady I rescued so heroically from that twopenny-halfpenny squall is none the worse for her wetting."

"Here she comes to answer for herself," returned the earl, as his niece came sailing up on the arm of Major Frankland. "Major Frankland, behold the preserver of your life from the hurricane yesterday. Lady Dangerfield has already thanked him. Major Frankland, my friend Captain O'Donnell."

Major Frankland bowed, but he also frowned and pulled his whisker. Why need the fellow be so confoundedly good-looking, and why need women make such a howling over a trifle? He hadn't even risked a wet jacket for Lady Dangerfield—he had risked nothing, in fact; and here she was for the second time pouring forth her gratitude with an effusion and volubility sickening to hear. Captain O'Donnell bore it all like the hero he was, and stood with his "blushing honors thick upon him," perfectly cool, perfectly easy, perfectly self-possessed.

"So *you* were the knight to the rescue, Captain O'Donnell?" Lady Cecil said, with a laugh that had a shadow of her father's sarcasm in it. "I might have known it if I had known you

were in the neighborhood at all. You have an amiable mania for saving people's lives. It reminds me of declining a verb. First person singular, he saves *my* life, second person singular he saves *your* life, third person singular he saves *his* life—meaning Sir Arthur over yonder. Really, if the tournament and tilting days were not over you might ride forth a veritable knight errant with visor closed, and corselet clasped, and lance in rest, to the rescue of fair maidens and noble dames in danger. But all this while, papa, you do not tell us what good fortune has sent Captain O'Donnell to Sussex, of all places in the world."

"And why not to Sussex, Lady Cecil? One could hardly select a fairer county to ruralize in. However, the choice on this occasion was not mine, but my sister's. She wished to come—why, Heaven knows—I never presume to ask the reason of a lady's whim. She wished to come to Sussex, to Castleford, and—here we are."

"Your sister?" Lady Cecil said, interested. "Yes, Mr. Wyatt told me in town she was with you; in ill health, too, I am almost afraid he said."

"In very ill health," the chasseur answered, gravely; "and I can set her anxiety to visit this place down to nothing but an invalid's meaningless whim. My great hope is that its gratification may do her good."

"Your sister here, and sick, Captain O'Donnell?" Lady Dangerfield cut in, "and *we* not know it? Abominable! Where are you staying?"

"In very pleasant quarters," with a smile at her *brusquerie*; "at the Silver Rose."

"Very pleasant for an Algerian soldier, perhaps—not so pleasant for an invalid lady. Your sister comes here, Captain O'Donnell—oh, I insist upon it—and shall make Scarswood her home during her stay. You too—Sir Peter and I will be *most* happy; indeed we shall take no excuse."

But Captain O'Donnell only listened and smiled that inexorable smile of his.

"Thanks very much; you are most kind; but of course, it is quite impossible."

"No one ever says impossible to me, sir," cries my lady, imperially. "Miss O'Donnell—*is* she Miss O'Donnell, by the bye? She is. Very well, then, Lady Cecil and I will call upon Miss O'Donnell to-morrow at the Silver Rose, and fetch her back with us here—that's decided."

"Gad! my dear," interrupted Lord Ruysland, "if you can

prevail upon O'Donnell to say yes when O'Donnell has made up his mind to say no, then you are a greater diplomat than I ever gave you credit for. 'Pon my life you should have seen and heard the trouble *I* had to induce him to honor Scarswood with his presence even for a few moments to-night. Said it wasn't worth while, you know—intended to leave in a week or so—didn't want to put in an appearance at all, by George, even to see *you* again, Queenie, one of his oldest friends."

"It is characteristic of Captain O'Donnell to treat his friends with profound disregard. Not over flattering to us, is it, Ginevra? By the way, though, I should have thought you would have liked to see Sir Arthur Tregenna again, at least He certainly would have put himself to considerable inconvenience for the pleasure of meeting *you*."

"What!" O'Donnell said, his eyes lighting with real pleasure, "Tregenna here! You are right, Lady Cecil; I shall be glad to meet him again—the best fellow!—Ah! I see him—very pleasantly occupied he appears to be, too."

"Flirting with the governess," put in the earl, stroking his iron-gray mustache. "Miss Herncastle must have something to say for herself, then, after all; she has succeeded in amusing Tregenna longer and better than I ever saw him before since he came here. How is it she comes to be among us to-night, Ginevra? Her first appearance, is it not?—and *very* unlike your usual tactics."

"Queenie would have it," Lady Dangerfield answered, with a shrug; "she persists in making the governess one of the family."

"Oh, Queenie would have it, would she?" the earl responded, thoughtfully looking at his daughter.. "Very considerate of Queenie, and she likes to have the baronet amused—naturally. Captain O'Donnell, you honor Miss Herncastle with a very prolonged and inquisitive gaze—may I ask if you have fallen a victim as well as Sir Arthur?"

"A victim? Well no, I think not. I am trying to recollect *where* I have seen Miss Herncastle before."

"What!" cried Lady Dangerfield; "you too? Oh, this is too much. First Lord Ruysland, then Sir Peter Dangerfield, now Captain O'Donnell, all are transfixed at sight of my nursery governess, and insist that, dead or alive, they have met her before. Now where was it *you* knew her, *Mon Capitaine!* Surely not in Algiers?"

"Not in Algiers, certainly Where I have seen her before

I cannot tell; seen her I have, that is positive—my memory for facts and faces may be trusted. And hers is not a face to be seen and forgotten, yet just now I cannot place it."

"Our waltz, I believe, Lady Cecil!" exclaimed a gentleman, coming up and salaaming before her. It was Squire Talbot, of Morecambe; and Lady Cecil, with a few last smiling words over her white shoulder to the chasseur, took his proffered arm and moved away.

"How strange," she was thinking, "that Captain O'Donnell should have known her too. Really, Miss Herncastle is a most mysterious personage. Why is it, I wonder, that she attracts and fascinates me so? It isn't that I like her—I don't; I doubt, I distrust her. Yet I like to look at her, to hear her talk, to wonder about her. How rapt Sir Arthur looks! *I* never succeeded in enchaining him like that. Four hours ago he was on the brink of asking me to be his wife—*now* he looks as though there were not another woman in the scheme of the universe than Helen Herncastle. Am I jealous, I wonder?—do I really want to marry him after all? Am I the coquette they call me?"

She smiled bitterly as she looked toward them. Squire Talbot caught that look and followed it.

"Eh! Quite a flirtation going on there, certainly." He was rather obtuse—the squire. "Didn't think Sir Arthur was much of a lady's man, but gad! to-night he seems—oh, good Heaven!"

He stopped short—he stared aghast. Miss Herncastle had lifted her stately head from the book of engravings and turned her face full toward them. And for the first time Squire Talbot saw her.

Lady Cecil looked at him and laughed outright. Amaze, consternation, horror, were actually pictured upon his face.

"What! another! Upon my word the plot thickens rapidly. You, too, have known Miss Herncastle then in some other and better world? Is she destined to strike every gentleman she meets in this sensational manner?"

"Miss—*what* did you call her, Lady Cecil? Good Ged! I never saw such a resemblance. Upon my sacred honor, Lady Cecil, I thought it was a ghost!"

"Of course—that's the formula—they all say that. Whose ghost do you take her for, Squire Talbot?"

"Katherine Dangerfield, of course—poor Kathie. It is—Good Ged!—it is as like her as—" the squire pulled out his

cambric and wiped his flushed and excited face. "I give you my word, I *never* saw such a resemblance. Except that this lady has darker hair, and yes—yes, I think—and is taller and more womanly—she is—" again the squire paused, his consternation only permitting disconnected sentences. "I never saw anything like it—never, I give you my honor. What does Sir Peter say? He must have noticed it, and gad, it can't be pleasant for *him*."

"Sir Peter has been in a collapsed and horrified state ever since she entered Scarswood. Oh, yes! he sees it—not a doubt of that. Miss Herncastle is like one of Wilkie Collins' novels—the interest intensifies steadily to the end—the 'Man in the Iron Mask' was plain reading compared to her. Really, if she keeps frightening people in this way, I greatly fear Lady Dangerfield must send her away. A living ghost can't be a pleasant instructress of youth."

"She does not seem to frighten Sir Arthur Tregenna, at least," said Squire Talbot, beginning to recover from his sudden shock. "And so she is only the governess. I never saw such a resemblance—never in all my life. What would Edith say, I wonder, if she could see it?"

"Edith?"

"My sister, you know—used to be Katherine Dangerfield's bosom friend and confidante—married now, you know—De Vere of the Plungers—and gone to south of France for her health. Gad! I don't think it would be safe to let them meet—she's nervous, Edith is—took Katherine's death, poor girl, very deeply to heart; and if she came suddenly upon this—this fac-simile, by George! of her friend, I wouldn't answer for the consequences. *Never* saw such a striking resemblance in all my life."

And then they whirled away in their waltz. How strange! how strange! Lady Cecil kept thinking. Perhaps that was why her eyes rarely wandered from these two at the table. No one interrupted them. It was a most pronounced flirtation. Even Captain O'Donnell declined the request of his hostess and the earl that he should go up and speak to his friend."

"By no means," he said, with a smile; "that can wait. It would be a pity to interrupt him—he seems so well amused."

It was Miss Herncastle herself who broke up the *tête-à-tête*. Sir Arthur had become so interested, so absorbed in his companion and the pictures, as to quite forget the flight of time.

Women never forget the proprieties, *les convenances*, in any situation of life. She arose, Lady Cecil still watching her with a curiously set and interested expression, spoke a few last half-smiling words, and hurried away. Like a man awakening from a dream, she saw Sir Arthur rise. No, Lady Cecil, *you* never succeeded in holding him spell-bound in this way, with all your beauty, all your brilliance. Then from an inner room she saw the tall chasseur make his way through the crowd, and approach. She could even hear his deep mellow tones, "Tregenna, my dear fellow, how goes it?" Then with a look of real pleasure lighting up his grave face, she saw the Cornish baronet clasp the hand of the Irish soldier of fortune. Was there anything in the sight of the cordial hand-clasp of those two men unpleasant to the sight of Lady Cecil Clive? Over the fair face an irritated flush came, into the brown, bright eyes a sudden, swift, dark anger passed. She turned away from the sight to her next partner, and for the rest of the night danced and flirted without intermission. Her laugh was gayer, her eyes brighter, her cheeks rosier than any there had ever seen them before. Bright at all times, some touch of feverish impatience and anger within made her positively dazzling to-night.

The "festive hours" drew to a close; the guests were fast departing. The music was pealing forth its last gay strains, as for the first moment she found herself alone. No touch of fatigue dimmed the radiance of that perfect face; that starry light gave her eyes the gleam of dark diamonds; the fever rose-tint was deeper than ever on her cheek, when looking up she saw approaching Lady Dangerfield on the arm of Captain O'Donnell.—Sir Arthur, stately and dignified, on her other hand. Her brilliant ladyship was vivaciously insisting upon something, the chasseur laughingly but resolutely refusing.

"Oh, here you are, Queenie!" her ladyship impatiently cried. "What an inveterate dancer you are becoming. It was fatiguing only to watch you to-night. Perhaps you will succeed where I fail. You and Captain O'Donnell appear to be old friends; try if you can prevail upon him and overcome his obstinacy."

"To overcome the obstinacy of Captain O'Donnell I know of old to be an impossible task. But to please you, Ginevra! On what particular point is our *Chasseur d'Afrique* obstinate now?"

"I want him to leave the inn at Castleford, with his sister,

and come here. The idea of stopping at an inn—a lady, too—preposterous! Sir Peter insists, *I* insist, Uncle Raoul insists, Sir Arthur insists—all in vain. And I used to think Irishmen the most gallant and yielding of men—could not possibly say no to a lady if they tried. I shall have another opinion of Captain O'Donnell's countrymen after to-night."

"You *will* come," *La Reine Blanche* said, with a glance of her long, luminous eyes, that had done fatal service ere to-night. Few men had ever the moral courage to say no to those bewitching eyes. "You will. Our motto is 'The More the Merrier.' We will do our best not to bore you. Scarswood is a pleasanter place than the Silver Rose. You will come—*I* wish it."

"And nobody ever says no to Queenie," Lady Dangerfield gayly added; "her rule is absolute monarchy."

He looked down into the beautiful, laughing, imperial face, and bent low before her, with all the gallantry of an Irishman, all the *débonnaire* of a Frenchman.

"I can believe it, Lady Dangerfield. And that *La Reine Blanche* may have the pleasure of a new sensation, permit *me* to say it—for once. To please Lady Cecil—what is there mortal man would not do? In this trivial matter she will, however, let me have my own obstinate way. If the Peri had never dwelt in Paradise, she would not have wept in leaving. I may be weak, but past sad experience has taught me wisdom. I take warning by the fate of the Peri."

His tone was very gentle, his smile very pleasant, but his will was invincible. The velvet glove sheathed a hand of iron: this was not the Redmond O'Donnell she had known—the impetuous, yielding lad, to whom she had but to say "come," and he came—"go," and he went. Was she testing her own power? If so, she failed signally. As he turned to go to the cloak-room she heard him humming a tune under his breath, a queer, provoking half-smile on his face. She caught the fag end of the words:

> "For the bird that is once in the toils, my dear,
> Can never be caught with chaff."

That half-amused, half-knowing smile was still on his mustached lips as he bade her a gay good-night, and was gone. The Irish Idyl had been written, and this was its English reading

## CHAPTER XII.

### "THE BATTLE OF FONTENOY."

THE small parlor of the Silver Rose looked very much to-day as it had done this day six years, when little Mrs. Vavasor had been its occupant. A trifle dustier and rustier, darker and dingier, but the same; and in one of its venerable, home-made arm-chairs, under its open front windows, sat another little lady, looking with weary eyes, up and down the street. It was Rose O'Donnell—the captain's sister. She was a little creature, as *petite* as Mrs. Vavasor herself, of fairy-like, fragile proportions, a wan, moonlight sort of face, lit with large, melancholy eyes. Those somber, blue eyes, under their black brows and lashes, reminded you of her brother; the rich, abundant brown hair, that was but a warmer shade of black, was also his; otherwise there was no resemblance. In repose the expression of that wan, small face was one of settled sadness; at intervals, though, it lit up into a smile of wonderful brightness and sweetness, and *then* she was more like her brother than ever. She wore gray silk, without ribbon, or lace, or jewel, and she looked like a little Quakeress. or a small, gray kitten, coiled up there in her big chair. She was quite alone, her delicate brow knit in deep and painful thought, her hands clasping and unclasping nervously in her lap, her great eyes fixed on the passers-by, but evidently not seeing them.

"This is the place," she said to herself, in a sort of whisper; "this is the town, and Scarswood was the house. At last—at last! But how will it end? Must I go on to my grave knowing nothing—nothing—whether he be living or dead, or am I to find out here? If I only dared tell Redmond—my best brother, my dearest friend—but I dare not. If he *be* alive, and they met, he would surely kill him."

An inner door opened, and her brother, a straw sombrero in one hand, a fishing-rod in the other, came in with his sounding trooper tread.

"Rose," he said hurriedly, "I did not mention it at breakfast, but I was absent last night. I met an old acquaintance, and he insisted upon taking me with him. I spent the evening at Scarswood Park."

"Scarswood Park!" It was almost a startled cry, but he did not notice it.

"Yes, Scarswood Park—place some three or four miles off—belonging to Sir Peter Dangerfield. Didn't see Sir Peter—saw my lady, though, and—here is where the interest comes in. She insists upon your leaving this hostelry and becoming her guest."

"I!"

"Yes. I chanced to do her some trifling service the other day—absurdly trifling to make such a fuss over—and she insists upon magnifying a mole-hill into a mountain, saying I saved her life and all that. She is really the most hospitable lady I ever met—wanted to insist upon us both pitching our tents in Scarswood. For myself, I declined, and do so still, of course; but for you—I have been thinking it over, and am not so sure. This isn't just the place of all places I should choose for you; perpetual skittles in a back-yard *can't* be agreeable to a well-constructed female mind. They are going to call to-day, and if they insist, and you prefer it, why, go with them, if you will."

"They—Sir Peter and Lady Dangerfield, do you mean?"

"No; Lady Dangerfield and her cousin, the Lady Cecil Clive. By the bye, I neglected to mention that I knew Lady Cecil and her father, Lord Ruysland, years ago, in Ireland. They're very civil and all that, and if they insist, as I said, and you prefer it—"

Her large eyes lit with an eager light.

"There can be no question as to my preference, brother; but if you object to it in any way—"

"Oh, I don't object. I would just as soon—sooner, indeed—you went, as you insist upon staying in this place at all. I shall remain here, and run down to see you every day until you have had enough of Castleford and Scarswood. And now, *au revoir* for the day—I'm going fishing."

He left the room whistling, flinging his sombrero carelessly on his dark curls, and throwing his fishing-rod over his shoulder. His sister watched his tall figure out of sight.

"So he knew this Lady Cecil years ago, in Ireland, and never told me! Odd! I wonder if Lanty knew her! I shall ask."

As if the thought had evoked him, *enter* Lanty Lafferty, a brush in one hand, a pair of his master's riding-boots in the other, darkened by an Algerian sun, otherwise not a whit changed by the wear and tear of six years' soldiering. He

deposited the boots on the hearth-rug, and stepped back, like a true artist, to survey his work.

"Thim's thim," said Lanty, "an' polished till ye might a'most shave yersilf in thim. Miss Rose, alanna! is ther anything in the wurruld wide I can do for ye? Shure me very heart's broke intirely since we kem to this place, wid sorra hand's turn to do from mornin' till night."

"What! And you complain of that, Lanty!" his young mistress said, with a smile. "Now, I should think you would be glad of a holiday after your active life out in Algiers. Surely you are not longing so soon to be off again soldiering?"

"Sodgering, is it? Oh, thin, 'tis wishin' it well I am for sodgering. Sorra luck or grace is thir about sich murtherin' work. I'm not sayin' agin fightin', mind; thir wasn't a boy in the barony fondher av a nate bit av a scrimmag thin meself; but out there among thim black haythins av Arabs, an' thim little swearin' divils av Frinchmin, that wor wurse nor onny haythin—oh, thin, sweet bad luck to it all! Shure, what the captain can see in it bates me intirely. As if it wasn't bad enough to be starved on black bread an' blacker soup, an' if ye said 'pays' about it, called up afore a coort-martial an' shot in the clappin' av yer hands. Faith, it turns me stomach this minute whin I think av all the tidy boys I've seen ordhered out at daybreak to kneel on thir own coffins an' be shot down like snipe for mebbe stickin' a frindly Arab, or givin' a word av divilment or divarshun to thir shuparior officer. May ould Nick fly away wid Algiers an' all belongin' to it afore Misther Redmond takes it into his head to go back there again. It's little I thought this time six years that I'd iver set fut in it or any other haythin lan' like it, whin Misther Redmond an' that beautiful young slip, the lord's daughter, wor coortin' beyant in Torryglen. Faix! it's marred I thought they'd be long an' many a day ago, wid mebbe three or four fine childer growin' up about thim an' myself dhry-nurse to thim same. But, oh, wirra! shure the Lord's will be done!"

Mr. Lafferty, with a sort of groan over the hollowness of human hope, shook his head, took a last admiring look at the glitter of the master's boots, and then turned to depart; but the young lady detained him.

"It's a harrowing case, Lanty. Don't be in a hurry. So the lord (I suppose you allude to Lord Ruysland, and don't mean anything irreverent,) and his daughter were in Ireland then before you ever went to Algiers?"

"Ay; ye may well say they wor. An' maybe it isn't in Algiers we'd be to this day av it wasn't for thim. Heaven forgive me, but the thought o' thim goes between me an' me night's sleep. Och! but it's the desavin' pair they wor. But shure what betther cud ye expect—didn't the English iver an' always discave the Irish—the curse o' Cromwell on thim! There they wor—an' it's the smile and civil word an' the 'God save ye kindly, Misther Redmond acushalla,' they had for him until a blind man cud see the sthate he was in. Sorra a hate they did but coort—Misther Redmond and herself—an' the ould lord lookin' on as plazed as Punch. Ay, faith, an' their looks an' their picters—wasn't she foriver taken off the old rocks and the castle an' meself, for that mather as if I was a baste. An' thin, whin it's wantin' to marry her he was—shure I could see it—by the powers! it's up an' away they wor like a shot, without as much as a good-by to ye, or go the divil, or the laste civility in life. An' the young masther—troth! it 'ud take a dhrop from ye if it was the last in yer eye—to see the shtate he was in, naither aitin' nor slapin', and fallin' away to dog-dhrive afore me very eyes. An' thin all at once Algiers kem in his head, an' he was off hot foot. Ye might as well thry to sthop Torrybahm whin it's spouhtin, as sthop him whin he takes a notion into his head. An' av coorse I wint wid him—didn't I mind him an' look afther him since he was a weeny crathure in my arrums. She was an inticin' young slip, I say, but upon my conscience, av she was tin lords' daughters, it was a mane-shpirited way to sarve him, afther him savin' her life, too. Divil a dirthier trick iver I heerd tell of."

Rose O'Donnell smiled bitterly.

"A very common thing in *her* world, I take it, Lanty. And that's Redmond's secret? and I am to see her? She was pretty, you say, Lanty?"

"The purtiest darlin' iver me eyes looked at, barrin' yersilf."

"Thanks, Lanty. Barring myself—that's understood, of course. Was she fair or dark?"

She asked the question with a woman's minute curiosity about such things. It was so hopelessly dull here at the "Silver Rose," that she felt strongly inclined to accept the invitation to Scarswood Park, if that invitation were tendered.

"Fair," responded Mr. Lafferty; "a skin like the shnow on the mountains, hair like sthramin' goold, an' eyes—oh musha! bad scran to thim, the beauties o' the worruld that they wor;

sure it's no wondher at all Masther Redmond wint out o' his head a'most about her. Troth she was purty, Miss Rose; it used to do me good only to look at her; an' wid iver an' always a smile on her beautiful face, an' a civil word for ye whiniver ye'd meet her. But I always said, an' I say again, it wasn't the action av a rale lady to thrate masther as she did, not av she wor twinty earls' daughters. It's like a gintleman from Ireland, an' an Irish gintleman; av ye wern't tould the difference shure ye might think *they* wor the same."

"And aren't they, Lanty?"

"Sorra taste—there's all the difference in life. A gintleman from Ireland is anybody, faith—meself an' the likes o' me, for that matter; and av ye come to that, the Laffertys wor the hoith o' quality whin the O'Donnells wor kings and quanes. But an Irish gintleman! Oh, be me Sokins! an Irish gintleman's a *gintleman indade*."

But Lanty's mistress did not hear the last of this eloquent explanation. She was gazing from behind the window curtain at a stately barouche, containing two elegantly dressed ladies, which had just driven up before the door. Lady Dangerfield and the Lady Cecil Clive, she felt sure—no such visitors ever stopped at the doorway of the Silver Rose.

The bowing and obsequious landlord and landlady bustled out to meet the distinguished arrivals.

A moment later, and the cards of the two ladies were borne upstairs and presented to Miss Rose O'Donnell.

"You will show them up here immediately, Mrs. Norton," she said to the dipping hostess of the Silver Rose.

And then, with a soft rustle of silk and muslin, a faint, sweet perfume, the baronet's *petite* wife and the earl's tall, graceful daughter were in the shabby parlor of the inn.

Rose O'Donnell came forward to meet and greet them with a calm, high-bred composure that was very perfect. In her southern home she was not, perhaps, accustomed to ladies of title, but she certainly had mingled in the highest society of New Orleans. How pretty she was, and how like those dark large eyes of blue were to her brother's. It was Lady Cecil's first thought, and as their hands clasped, and Cecil's grave, sweet blue eyes were lifted to her face, she stooped down with a sudden, swift impulse and kissed her. From that hour these two were ever warmest friends.

"I think I should have known you anywhere, Miss O'Donnell," Lady Dangerfield said, "you are so like your brother--

only wanting that half-cynical, half-sarcastic air he and all men nowadays, it seems to me, wear. I suppose he is one of the believers in the 'Nothing is new, and nothing is true, and it don't signify' doctrine; he looks as though he were. He has told you, of course, how he saved my life two days ago, when our boat upset?"

"Saved your life! Indeed, he has not."

Lady Cecil laughed softly.

"That's like Captain O'Donnell—'on their own merits modest men are dumb;' and he is *very* modest. He saved mine too—did he ever tell you that?"

"No," Rose said, with an amused smile; "but Lanty has. Perhaps, however, you have forgotten Lanty?"

"Lanty—Lanty Lafferty—is he here? How glad I shall be to see him. Forget Mr. Lafferty! Not likely; he was my first love. I don't think he ever knew it, and in all those years no one has ever replaced him."

Lady Dangerfield looked at her laughing cousin with something of a malicious gleam in her black eyes.

"Substituting the name of Redmond O'Donnell for that of Lanty Lafferty, I dare say what she says may be true enough," she thought. "I should like to read the record of those seven Irish weeks, my handsome Cecil, and see if I could not find the key to your noted indifference to all men. Miss O'Donnell," aloud, "at least I hope that secretive brother of yours has told you we came to tender the hospitality of Scarswood Park—to insist indeed upon your becoming our guest. If you knew how much we desire it, I am sure you would not refuse us this pleasure We are all most anxious—Sir Peter, myself, Lady Cecil—all. It must be so horribly dull for you here alone, for of course Captain O'Donnell, like all of his kind, brothers and husbands, is no company whatever. Except as lovers, men might as well be images of wood, for all the pleasure one has in their society, and even then they are bores to all but one. We will take no denial; we positively insist upon it."

She was really in earnest—she really wished it most eagerly. Whenever a new fancy struck her, she hunted it down with the feverish intensity of an aimless, idle life, and she had a fancy for this pale, silent young Irishwoman becoming her guest. Her liking for the brother extended to the sister, and through her artificial manner sincere cordiality shone now.

"You *will* come?" Lady Cecil added, with a smile and a

glance that went straight to Rose O'Donnell's heart. "Your brother was hopelessly obstinate last night; don't make us think obstinacy is a family failing. You will come, and this evening; Scarswood is the pleasantest country house I know of."

There could be no doubting the sincerity of the invitation—none but a very churl could have refused. Rose O'Donnell, under a cloud just at present, was the farthest possible from a churl. With a smile that again made her excessively like her brother, she promised, and the ladies from the Park arose to go."

"The carriage shall come for you this evening," Lady Dangerfield said. "Your brother will accompany you, and dine with us, at least. This evening at six, then, we shall expect you."

And then the cousins swept away down the narrow stairs, where such shining visitors were rarely seen, and into the barouche, and away through the July sunshine back to luncheon.

"Pretty," was Lady Dangerfield's verdict, "but *passée*. Looks as though she were in trouble of some sort. Crossed in love, probably," with a short laugh, "out in her American French city."

"She is in ill health; did not Captain O'Donnell say so?" replied Lady Cecil with grave rebuke. "It is a lovely face to my mind—brunette with blue eyes—a rare type."

"It is a feminine repetition of Redmond O'Donnell's face; the eyes and smile are as like as they can be. *He* is very handsome, very dashing, very distinguished, Queenie," maliciously; "how is it you never chanced to tell me you spent seven long weeks with him among the hills of Ulster?"

If she expected to see hesitation or embarrassment in her cousin's face, she was mistaken. That proud, fair face, those luminous dark eyes, those lovely lips kept their secret—if secret there were—well.

"Hardly with him, I think—with papa, Ginevra. And really, how was I to tell the circumstance would interest you?—that you would honor Redmond O'Donnell with such signal marks of your favor? It would be some trouble to keep you *au courant* of all my gentlemen acquaintances."

"And he saved your life; and you were only sixteen, and he—was he as eminently good-looking six years ago as he is to-day, Queenie?"

"Better, to my mind," Lady Cecil responded, calmly; "he

looks *blasé* and cynical now, as you say. He had not worn out his trust in all mankind then; and I confess I rather prefer people who haven't outlived all faith in their fellow-creatures, and who have one or two human emotions left."

"My dear," Lady Dangerfield said, laughing, "he has had the misfortune to know *La Reine Blanche*. Did you flesh your maiden sword upon him, I wonder? You had to begin your career with some one—as well a wild young Irishman as anything else. And you have been *so* reticent, my dear, on the subject—too tender to be touched. No, don't be angry; it isn't worth while, and might spoil your appetite for game pie and Moselle. You knew Redmond O'Donnell six years ago, and—you are to marry Sir Arthur Tregenna—next year is it? What a farce life is, or a tragedy, which?"

"Life is what we make it," Lady Cecil answered, with a little, bitter smile; "a tragedy to howl over, or a comedy to laugh at. The wiser philosophy is to laugh, I believe, since it is out of our power to alter or decide over fate. There is Miss Herncastle gathering flowers; how fond she seems to be of flowers! What a dark, somber face she has!—what an extraordinary person altogether—like the heroine of a romance. But then governesses always *are* heroines, are they not?—prime favorites with novelists. I rather fear *she* has found life too dark a tragedy, by any possibility to make a jest of."

"She is the best embroideress I ever saw," Lady Dangerfield said, sweeping her silken robes up the sunlit stairs. "I found it out by chance yesterday. Her work in lace and cambric is something marvelously beautiful. I had some thought of sending her away—one doesn't want a person about the house who terrifies every one she meets—but now I shall retain her. Her embroideries are worth three hundred a year to me, and she certainly has accepted a very low salary."

She certainly had, and that was a great consideration with my lady. As has been said, long years' bitter battle with poverty had taught her the value of wealth, and though she squandered Sir Peter's income recklessly on her own pleasure and gratification, she yet could be unspeakably mean in small things. Now that she had discovered how useful she could make Miss Herncastle, she resolved not only to retain her, but to patronize her. Miss Herncastle also had exquisite taste and judgment in all matters pertaining to the toilet—why not dismiss her maid by and by, and install this useful and willing nursery governess in her place?

Miss O'Donnell came over from Castleford in the gray of the summer evening, with her belongings, but alone. Sir Arthur Tregenna had sought out the chasseur at his fishing stream, and the twain would return together to dinner. She was shown to her room, and exchanged her dark gray dress for a dinner robe of blue silk, the hue of her eyes, and descended to find her hostess and cousin spending the long hour before dinner on the velvety lawn sloping away beneath the long, wide, open French window of the drawing-room. The children were at play on the terrace below, where gaudy peacocks strutted in the sun, a million leaves fluttered cool and green above them, and birds caroled in the dark shade of the branches. Miss Herncastle, in her gray silk dress, sat at a little distance, her fingers flying among my lady's laces. Lady Cecil bent over a book, her fair, delicate face and slight, graceful figure outlined against the golden and purple light of the sunset, lilies in her bronze hair, a cluster of field lilies on her breast—tall, slim, sweet. My lady leaned back lazily in her rustic chair, doing nothing—it was an amiable trait in this lady's character that she never *did* do anything—beautifully dressed, powdered, painted, coiffured, and awaiting impatiently the arrival of the dinner hour and the gentlemen. Major Frankland was absent with the earl, and her husband of course, whether in his study or out of it, did not count. In the absence of the nobler sex, my lady always collapsed on principle—gaping piteously. She never read, she never worked, she never thought. Society and adulation were her stimulants—in their absence life became an unbearable bore.

She hailed the advent of Rose O'Donnell now with relief She couldn't talk to the governess—*that* were too great condescension—the children were noisy nuisances, and Lady Cecil was interested in her book. The waving trees, the flushed sky, the sleeping sea, the silent emerald earth—all the fair evening prospect had no charm for her.

"You find us alone yet, Miss O'Donnell," she said, as Rose took a seat near. "Our fishermen have not returned, and solitude invariably bores me to death. Cecil has taken to literature, as you see, and is company for no one. I never read, Miss O'Donnell—books are all alike, hopelessly stupid nowadays. What is that you have there, Queenie?"

Lady Cecil looked up.

"Ballads of Ireland. I came upon it by chance in the library half an hour ago. I am reading the battle of Fontenoy.

Miss O'Donnell, did any of your ancestors fight at the battle of Fontenoy?"

"So the legends of our house say, at least. 'And by the same token,' as Lanty would observe, it was a Redmond O'Donnell who fought and fell on the fatal field of Fontenoy."

Lady Dangerfield looked interested.

"A Redmond O'Donnell. Really! Read it, Queenie, will you?"

"Never read aloud," Lady Cecil answered; "it is an accomplishment I do not possess." She glanced suddenly at the busy fingers of the governess.

"Miss Herncastle," she called.

Miss Herncastle paused in her work, and looked up.

"You will read it to Lady Dangerfield, will you not? Somehow I think *you* can read aloud."

"I can try," Miss Herncastle answered. She laid down her work, advanced, took the book, and stood up before her auditors. The last light of the setting sun shone full upon her tall, statuesque figure, her pale, changeless face, locked ever in the passionless calm of marble. She began. Yes, Miss Herncastle could read aloud—Lady Cecil had been right. What a wondrously musical voice it was—so deep, so calm, so sweet. She made a very striking picture standing there, outlined against the purple gloaming, the sunlight gilding her face and her dead-black hair. So thought Rose O'Donnell, so thought Lady Cecil Clive, so thought two gentleman advancing slowly, unseen and unheard, up the avenue, under the trees—Sir Arthur Tregenna and Captain O'Donnell. Both, as if by some simultaneous impulse, stopped to listen.

"'Push on, my household cavalry!' King Louis madly cried;
To death they rush, but rude their shock—not unavenged they died.
On through the camp the column trod—King Louis turns his rein.
'Not yet, my liege,' Saxe interposed, 'the Irish troops remain.'

"'Lord Clare,' he says, 'you have your wish; there are your Saxon foes!'
The marshal almost smiles to see, so furiously he goes!
How fierce the look these exiles wear, who're wont to be so gay,
The treasured wrongs of fifty years are in their hearts to-day—
The treaty broken ere the ink wherewith 'twas writ could dry,
Their plundered homes, their ruined shrines, their women's parting cry,
Their priesthood hunted down like wolves, their country overthrown—
Each looks as if revenge for all were staked on him alone.
On, Fontenoy—on, Fontenoy, nor ever yet elsewhere
Rushed on to fight a nobler band than these proud exiles were.

"O'Brien's voice is hoarse with joy, as halting, he commands,
'Fix bay'nets—charge!' like mountain storm rush on these fiery bands!
Thin is the English column now, and faint their volleys grow,
Yet must'ring all the strength they have they make a gallant show;
They press their ranks upon the hill to face that battle wind—

Their bayonets the breakers' foam; like rocks the men behind!
One volley crashes from their line, when through the surging smoke,
With empty guns clutched in their hands, the headlong Irish broke.
On, Fontenoy—on, Fontenoy, hark to that fierce huzza!
'Revenge! Remember Limerick! Dash down the Sassenagh!'

"Like lions leaping at a fold when mad with hunger's pang,
Right up against the English line the Irish exiles sprang!
Bright was their steel, 'tis bloody now, their guns are filled with gore;
Through shattered ranks, and severed files, and trampled flags they tore:
The English strove with desperate strength, paused, rallied, staggered, fled—
The green hillside is matted close with dying and with dead;
Across the plain and far away passed on that hideous wrack,
While cavalier and fantassin dash in upon their track.
On, Fontenoy—on, Fontenoy, like eagles in the sun.
With bloody plumes the Irish stand—the field is fought and won!"

She paused. Sweet, clear, thrilling as a bugle blast rang out the stirring words. A light leaped into her eyes, a glow came over her pale face; every heart there stirred under the ring of her tone, her look, her gesture as she ceased.

"By Jupiter!" Redmond O'Donnell exclaimed, under his breath, "that woman is a marvel."

Lady Cecil stretched out her hand for the book, a look of surprised admiration in her eyes.

"Miss Herncastle," she said, "you read that splendidly. The poet should have heard you. I knew you could read but not like that. You are a born actress."

The governess bowed, smiled, and walked back with immovable composure to her place.

"Shall we approach now?" Sir Arthur said, in a constrained voice.

There was no reply. He looked at his companion—the eyes of Redmond O'Donnell were fixed on Miss Herncastle with such a look of utter wonder—of sheer amaze and of *recognition*—that the baronet stared at him in turn. Standing there it had flashed upon him like an inspiration where he had seen Miss Herncastle before. He started like a man from a trance at the sound of the baronet's surprised voice.

"How thunderstruck you look, O'Donnell," he said, with a touch of impatience in his tone; "did you never before hear a lady read?"

The half-irritated words fully aroused him.

Redmond O'Donnell turned away from the governess with a slight laugh.

"Rarely like that, *mon ami*. And I have just solved a riddle that has puzzled me since last night. I think I have had the pleasure of both seeing and hearing Lady Dangerfield's very remarkable governess before to-day."

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE MYSTERY OF BRACKEN HOLLOW.

MISS HERNCASTLE'S audience had been increased by still two more. The Earl of Ruysland and Major Frankland, sauntering up the avenue, had also paused afar off to listen. Against the rose and gold light of the summer sunset, Miss Herncastle's tall figure and striking face made a very impressive picture. It was a pretty tableau altogether: Lady Cecil, fair, languid, sweet; my lady in her rich robes and sparkling jewels; Rose O'Donnell with her small, piquant face literally seeming all eyes; and the accessories of waving trees, luminous sky, tinkling fountains, and fragrant flowers.

"Ah!" Lord Ruysland said, when the spell was broken and he and his companion moved on once more, "what have we here? A second-rate actress from the Surrey side of the Thames? Upon my life, so much histrionic talent is quite thrown away. Miss Herncastle (I wonder if her father's name was Herncastle, by the bye?) is wasting her sweetness on desert air. On the boards of Drury Lane her rendering of Fontenoy would be good for at least two rounds from pit and gallery. Bravo! Miss Herncastle!" He bowed before her now with the stately courtliness of his youth. "I have read of entertaining angels unawares—are *we* entertaining a modern Mars, all unknown until now?"

The covert sneer that generally embellished everything this noble peer said was *so* covert, that only a very sensitive ear could have caught it. Miss Herncastle caught it and lifted her great gray eyes for one moment to his face—full, steadily. Something in the grave, clear eyes seemed to disconcert him—he stopped abruptly and turned away from her.

"Gad!" he thought, "it *is* strange. Never saw such an unaccountable likeness in all my life. *She* has looked at me a thousand times with just such a look as Miss Herncastle gave me now. Confound Miss Herncastle! What the deuce does the young woman mean, by looking so horribly like other women dead and gone?"

He turned from the party and walked with a sulky sense of injury into the house. But all the way up to his room, all the time the elaborate mysteries of the toilet were going on (and

the mysteries of Lady Dangerfield's herself were plain reading compared to this old dandy of the ancient regime), all the time these strong, steady gray eyes pursued him like an uncomfortable ghost.

"Hang Miss Herncastle," again the noble earl growled. "Cecil doesn't look like her mother;—what business, then, has an utter stranger to resemble her in this absurd way? It's like living in the house with a nightmare; my digestion is upset for the rest of the day. It's deucedly unpleasant and, egad! I think I must ask Ginevra to dismiss her, if she continues to disturb me in this way."

Redmond O'Donnell had stood a little aloof, stroking his mustache meditatively, and gazing at the governess. A perfumed blow of a fan on the arm, a soft little laugh in his ear, recalled him.

"'And still he gazed, and still the wonder grew!' Is Miss Herncastle the Gorgon's head, or is it a case of love at sight. In either event, let me present you and exorcise the spell."

It was Lady Cecil's smiling face that he turned to see. Lady Cecil, who, with a wave of that fragrant fan, summoned the governess to her side.

"Miss Herncastle, take compassion on this wretched exile of Erin, and say something consolatory to him. He stands helplessly here and 'sighs and looks, sighs and looks, sighs and looks, and looks again.' Captain Redmond O'Donnell, *Le Beau Chasseur*—Miss Herncastle."

She flitted away as she spoke with a saucy, backward glance at *Le Beau Chasseur*, and up to her cousin Ginevra.

"Oh, if you please, my lady," with a little housemaid's courtesy, "I have a favor to ask. Don't banish poor Miss Herncastle to mope to death in the dreary upper region of the nursery and school-room. She is a lady—treat her as such—your guest—treat her as a guest. Let her come to dinner."

"Queenie! Miss Herncastle to dinner! My guest! What Quixotic nonsense you talk. She is my dependant, not my visitor."

"That is her misfortune, not her fault. Miss Herncastle is a lady to her finger tips, and fifty times cleverer than you or I. See how she interests all the gentlemen. Issue your commands, O Empress of Scarswood. She will make our heavy family dinner go off."

"Interest the gentlemen! Yes, I should say so. She seems to entertain Captain O'Donnell and Sir Arthur Tregenna

pretty thoroughly at this moment. Queenie, I don't understand you; *you* should be the last on earth to ask for much of Miss Herncastle. Where are your eyes?"

"In their old situation. You don't understand me?" Lady Cecil laughed a little, and glanced over at the two gentlemen to whom the tall governess talked. "No, perhaps not—perhaps I don't quite understand myself. Never mind that; perhaps I like Miss Herncastle—perhaps the spell of the enchantress is over me, too. We won't ask questions, like a good little cousin; we will only ask Miss Herncastle to dinner to-day, to-morrow, and all the to-morrows?"

"Well, certainly, Queenie, if you really wish it; but I confess I *can't* understand—"

"Don't try, *ma chère;* 'where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise.' Once a lady, always a lady, is it not? and though Miss Herncastle be a governess to-day, she has been something far different in days gone by. Thanks for this favor. Let your invitation be gracious, Ginevra, as your invitations can be when you like."

She turned away and walked into the house. Her cousin looked after her with a perplexed face. What *could* Queenie mean? Why, it was plain as the rose-light yonder in the west that Sir Arthur Tregenna was going to fall in love with her; Sir Arthur Tregenna, who had come down here expressly to fall in love with Lady Cecil Clive; Sir Arthur, in whom all Lady Cecil's hopes and ambitions should be centered. And here was Lady Cecil now begging this inconvenient governess might be brought forward, thrown into his society, treated as an equal, and left to work her Circean spells.

"It's the strangest thing I ever heard of—it's absurd, preposterous. However, as I have promised, I suppose I must perform. And what will Uncle Raoul say? I shall keep an eye upon you this first evening, Miss Herncastle, and if I find you attempt to entrap Sir Arthur, your first evening will be your last."

Miss Herncastle's two cavaliers fell back as my lady appeared. The other gentlemen had gone to their rooms to dress for dinner; those two followed now. Captain O'Donnell's share in the conversation had been slight, but there was a look of conviction on his face as he ran up to his room.

"It *is* she," he said to himself; "there is not a doubt about it. A nursery governess. Rather a disagreeable change, I

should imagine, after the life she has left. What in the name of all that is mysterious can have brought her here?"

Miss Herncastle listened in grave surprise as my lady tersely and curtly issued her commands.

"It is my desire, at the solicitation of Lady Cecil Clive, Miss Herncastle, that you dine with us to-day," she said, snappishly. "There is no necessity for any change in your dress. You are well enough."

Miss Herncastle was robed like a Quakeress, in gray silk, a pearl brooch fastening her lace collar, and a knot of blue ribbon in her hair. She looked doubtfully at my lady as she listened.

"Lady Cecil Clive wishes me to dine with you to-day, my lady?" she repeated, as though not sure she had heard aright.

"I have said so," my lady replied, still more snappishly. "I don't pretend to understand, only she does, that is enough. Lady Cecil's wishes are invariably mine."

And then my lady, with her silken train sweeping majestically behind her, sailed away, and the governess, who had so signally come to honor, was left alone—alone with the paling splendor of the sunset, with the soft flutter of the July wind, with the twitter of the birds in the branches, and the peacocks promenading to and fro on the stone terraces. These peacocks, with their stately strut and outstretched tails, bore an absurd resemblance to my lady herself, and Miss Herncastle's darkly thoughtful face broke into a smile as she saw it.

"As the queen pleases," she said, with a shrug. "And I am to dine with the Right Honorable the Earl of Ruysland, the Lady Cecil, and two baronets. Some of us are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them. I am one of the latter, it appears. I thought the power to wonder at anything earthly had left me forever, but I wonder—I wonder what Lady Cecil means by this."

Miss Herncastle, the governess, half an hour later sat down among this very elegant company at dinner. Sir Peter Dangerfield scowled through his eye-glass as he took his seat.

"What the deuce does this mean?" he thought, savagely; "bringing the brats' governess to dinner. To annoy me, nothing else; that's her amiable motive always to annoy me."

Miss Herncastle found herself placed between the Earl of Ruysland and Sir Arthur Tregenna. The earl, immaculately got up, spotless, ruffled, snowy linen, tail coat, rose in his button-hole, diamond ring on his finger, hair perfumed, and

hands white and delicate as his daughter's own, looked the whole patrician Peerage of England personified in himself. And with all the suave gallantry of a latter-day Chesterfield he paid compliments and made himself eminently agreeable to the lady by whom he was seated. His digestion might be upset, his peace of mind destroyed by the proximity, but his handsome face was placid as a summer lake.

"Your reading of that poem was something quite wonderful, Miss Herncastle, I give you my word. I have heard some of the best elocutionists of the day—on the stage and off it—but upon my life, my dear young lady, you might make the best of them look to their laurels. I wonder now, with your talents and—pardon an old man—your personal appearance, you have never turned your thoughts in that direction—the stage I mean. It is our gain at present, but it is the loss of the theatrical world."

Miss Herncastle smiled—supremely at her ease.

"Your lordship is pleased to be complimentary or sarcastic—the latter, I greatly fear. It is one thing to read a poem decently, and quite another to electrify the world as Lady Macbeth. I may teach children of nine to spell words of two syllables and the nine parts of speech, but I fear I would receive more hisses than vivas on the boards of the Princess."

By some chance she looked up as she finished speaking, and met a pair of dark, keen eyes looking at her across the table, with the strangest, most sarcastic look. Those cynical blue eyes belonged to the Irish-African soldier, Captain O'Donnell. He smiled as he met her gaze.

"Miss Herncastle does herself less than justice," he said very slowly. "A great actress she might never be—we have no great actresses nowadays—but a clever actress, I am very sure. As to *Lady Macbeth*, I have no means of knowing, but in the character of *Ophelia*, now, I am quite certain, she would be charming."

Miss Herncastle's steady hand was lifting a glass of champagne. The sudden and great start she gave overset the glass and spilled the wine.

"How awkward I am!" she said with a laugh; "if I commit such *gaucheries* as this, I fear Lady Dangerfield will repent having invited her governess to dinner. Thanks, my lord; don't trouble yourself; my dress has escaped."

In the trifling confusion of the accident Captain O'Donnell's remark passed unanswered, and it was noticeable that Miss

Herncastle took care not to meet those steel-blue eyes once again until the ladies left the table.

It was he who sprang up and held the door open for them, and as she swept by last, she lifted her large eyes suddenly, and shot him a piercing glance. He bowed slightly, smiled slightly, then the door closed, and the gentlemen drew up, charged and toasted.

It was rather remarkable that Sir Arthur Tregenna, usually the most abstemious of men, drank much more wine than any one there had ever seen him drink before. Major Frankland, from his place at the end of the table, saw it, and shrugged his shoulders with a *sotto voce* comment to his neighbor O'Donnell.

"Used to be absurdly temperate—a very anchorite, whatever an anchorite may be. I don't know whether you have noticed, but all the men who have lost their heads for Ruysland's peerless daughter and been rejected, have taken to port and sherry, and stronger still. It seems to be synonymous—falling in love with Lady Cecil, and falling a victim to strong drink."

"Well, yes, it does," the chasseur responded. "I remember Annesly Carruthers, in Paris, used to jump to his feet, half sprung, with flashing eyes and flowing goblet, and cry, 'Here's to *La Reine Blanche*—Heaven bless her!' I wonder if that tipsy prayer was heard? He took to hard drinking after she jilted him; he used to be pretty sober before. There seems to be a fatality about it," the young Irishman said, reflectively, filling his own glass. "Powercourt drank himself blind, too, exchanged into a line regiment ordered to Canada, and *he* was seldom drunk more than three times a week, before she did for him. I wonder how it is! She doesn't order 'em to 'Fill the bumper fair; every drop they sprinkle o'er the brow of Care smoothes away a wrinkle,' you don't suppose, does she?"

"I don't suppose Tregenna's one of her victims, certainly," responded Frankland. "Lucky beggar! he's safe to win, with his long rent-roll and longer lineage."

"Ah! awfully old family, I'm given to understand," O'Donnell said; "were barons in the days of Edward the Confessor and William the other fellow. But then *La Reine Blanche* has *such* a talent for breaking hearts and turning heads; and what a woman may do in any given phase of life is, as Lord Dundreary says, 'One of these things no fellah can understand.'"

They adjourned to the drawing-room, whence sounds of music already came wafted through the open window, but in the

drawing-room they found Miss Herncastle alone. The soft, silvery beauty of the twilight had tempted the rest out on the lawn. Lady Cecil sat in her rustic chair, humming an opera air, and watching with pensive, dreamy eyes the moon lift its silver sickle over the far-off hills. And Lady Dangerfield and Rose O'Donnell sat chatting of feminine fashions and the last sweet thing in bonnets.

The gentlemen joined them—that is, with the exception of the Cornish baronet. Music was his passion, and then Miss Herncastle had looked up with a telling glance and smile, and some slight remark as he went by—slight, but sufficient to draw him to her side, and hold him there. The earl lingered also, but afar off, and buried in the downy depths of a puffy silken chair, let himself be gently lulled to sleep. Major Frankland, as a matter of course, joined Sir Peter's wife, and Sir Peter, with a sheet of white paper, and some corks, on which moths were impaled, and a net, went in search of glow-worms. And Captain O'Donnell flung his six feet of manhood full length on the velvet sward at the feet of the earl's daughter, the delicious sea-scented evening wind lifting his brown hair, and gazed serenely up at the star-studded sky.

"Neat thing—very neat thing, Lady Cecil, in the way of moonrise. How Christian-like, how gentle, how calm, how happy a man feels after dinner! Ah, if life could be 'always afternoon,' and such turf as this, and such a sky as that, and one might lie at Beauty's feet, and—smoke! Smoking is useful among flowers, too—kills the aphides and all that, and if Lady Cecil will permit—"

"Lady Cecil permits," Lady Cecil said, laughing; "produce man's best comforter, Captain O'Donnell; light up, and kill the aphides."

Captain O'Donnell obeyed; he produced a cigar case, selected carefully a weed, lit up, and fumigated.

"This is peace—this is bliss; why, oh why need it ever end; Lady Cecil, what are you reading?" He took her book.

"Pretty, I know, by all this azure and gilding. Ah, to be sure, Owen Meredith—always Owen Meredith. How the ladies do worship that fellow. Cupid's darts, broken hearts, silvery beams, rippling streams, vows here and there, love everywhere. Yes, yes, the old story, despair, broken vows, broken hearts—it's their stock in trade."

"And of course such things as broken vows and broken

hearts only serve to string a poetaster's rhymes. We all know that in real life there is no such thing."

"We know nothing of the sort. Hearts are broken every day, and their owners not a wit the worse for it in the end. Better, if anything. 'The heart may break, yet brokenly live on,' sighs and sings the most lachrymose of all poets, and I agree with him. Live on uncommonly well, and if the pieces be properly cemented, grow all the stronger for the breakage."

"Captain O'Donnell speaks for himself, of course; and Irishmen's hearts are the most elastic organs going. Give me my book, sir, and don't be so horribly cynical."

"Cynical, am I? Well, yes, perhaps I am—cynicism is, I believe, the nineteenth century name for truth. Hallo! what's all this? There's my fellow Lanty, with a letter in his hand, and what *has* he done to Sir Peter?"

"Lanty—Lanty Lafferty! How glad I am to see Lanty. He has murdered some of poor Peter's beetles I'm afraid—the slaughter of the innocents over again. See how excited the baronet is over it."

It *was* Lanty, and Lanty had murdered a beetle. He had espied it crawling slowly along Sir Peter's nice white sheet of paper, and had given it a sudden dexterous whip with a branch of lilac and—annihilated it. Sir Peter sprang to his feet with flashing eyes.

"How dare you, sir! how dare you kill my specimen, the finest I have found this summer? How dare you do it, you muddle-headed Irishman?"

For Lanty's nationality was patent to the world. Lanty pulled off his hat now, and made the baronet a politely depreciating bow.

"How dar I do it? Is it dar to kill a dirthy cockroach? Shure yer honor's joking! Faith I wish I had a shillin' for ivery wan av thim I've killed in my day; it's not a footboy I'd be this minit. Begorra I thought I was doin' ye a good turn. Shure, ye seen yerself, it was creepin' over the clane paper, a big black, creepin' divil av a cockroach."

'Cockroach, you fool! I tell you it was a specimen of the *Blatta Orientalis*—the finest specimen of the *Blatta Orientalis* I ever saw."

"Oh, Mother o' Moses!"

"And you must come along, you thick-headed numbskull, after all the trouble I've had with it, and kill it. And only two days since it was born, you blundering bog-trotter!"

Mr. Lafferty's expression was fine, as he regarded the smashed cockroach and the little baronet with mingled looks of compassion and contempt.

"Born, is it? Thim dhirty little bastes! *Born!* oh, wirra! Maybe it was christened, too! Faix, I wudn't wondher at all!"

With which Lanty took his departure, and approaching his mistress, presented his letter with a bow.

"Miss Rose, alana! a bit av a letther av ye plase. An' meself's thinkin' from thim postmaks that it's from the ould munseer himself, in New Orleans beyant."

"Lanty!" called the sweet, clear voice of Lady Cecil, "come here, and tell me if you have quite forgotten the troublesome mistress of Torryglen, for whom you performed so many innumerable services in days gone by? *You* may have forgotten, and grown cynical and disagreeable—like master like man—but *I* have not."

She held out her white-ringed, slim hand, and Mr. Lafferty touched it gingerly, and bowed before that fair, gracious, smiling face, his own beaming with pleasure.

"Forget ye, is it? Upon me conscience, my lady, the man or woman isn't alive that cud do *that* av they tried. Long life to yer ladyship! It's well I remimber your beautiful face, and troth, it's more and more beautiful it gets every day."

"Draw it mild, Lanty," Lanty's master said, lazily; "we are not permitted to speak the truth to ladies about their looks, when, as in the present case, the simple truth *sounds* like gross flattery. You may go now; and for the future, my good fellow, let Sir Peter Dangerfield's black beetles alone."

Mr. Lafferty departed accordingly, giving the beetle-hunting baronet a wide berth, as ordered. The next moment Rose came hurriedly over to where her brother lay, still lazily smoking and star-gazing, her open letter in her hand.

"News from New Orleans, Redmond, a letter from grand papa. Madame de Lansac is very ill."

The twilight music, floating so softly, so sweetly out into the silvery gloaming, had ceased a moment before, and the two figures at the piano approached the open window, nearest Lady Cecil and the chasseur. Miss Herncastle had paused a second before joining the lawn party, something in the starry moonlit loveliness of the fair English landscape stirring her heart with a throb of exquisite remembrance and pain. Sir Arthur Tregenna—grave, somber—by her side, was very silent too. *How* well he liked to be here, he alone knew; and yet his place was at

the feet of yonder fair, proud peer's daughter, thrice as lovely, thrice as sweet, as this dark daughter of the earth, the spell of whose sorcery had fallen upon him. So standing, dead silent both, they heard the words of Rose O'Donnell.

"Madame de Lansac!"—it was Redmond O'Donnell who spoke, removing his cigar and looking up—"ill is she? I thought that handsome Creole was never ill. Nothing serious, I hope?"

"It is serious—at least grandpapa says so. Perhaps his fears exaggerate the danger. She is ill of yellow fever."

"Ah! I should have thought she was pretty well acclimated by this time. And our infant uncle, Rose—how is he? Lady Cecil, it is not given to every man of eight-and-twenty to possess an uncle four years old. Such is my happy fortune. How is the Signor Claude?"

"Little Claude is well," his sister answered. "Poor madame —and I liked her so much. Here is what grandpapa says: 'Dear Marie, if there is any change for the worse I shall telegraph over at once, and I shall expect Redmond to send or fetch you out again. Claude has pined to a shadow, and calls for Marie night and day.' So you see, Redmond, it may end in our returning after all. Still, I hope there may be no necessity."

Miss O'Donnell folded up her letter and walked away. Lady Cecil looked inquiringly at her companion.

"Marie?" she said. "Your sister's name is Rose, Captain O'Donnell, is it not?"

"Rose, yes; Rose Marie—called after her paternal and maternal grandmothers. Our mother was a Frenchwoman—I think I told you the family pedigree once before, didn't I?—and our grandfather is M. De Lansac, of Menadarva. When Rose went out there, to be brought up as her grandfather's heiress and all that, the old French grandpère changed, without troubling Congress in the matter, the obnoxious Celtic cognomen of O'Donnell for the Gallic patronymic of De Lansac. In other words, Rose O'Donnell left Ireland, and twelve hours after her arrival in the Crescent City became Marie De Lansac."

There was a faint exclamation—it came from the open window. The speaker and Lady Cecil both looked up, and saw that pretty tableau—the Cornish baronet and the nursery governess.

"You are ill, Miss Herncastle," Sir Arthur said. "The night air, the falling dew—"

He stopped. No, my Lady Cecil! Lovely, gracious, high-born as you are, there never came for you into those calm, blue eyes the look that glows in them now for your cousin's silent, somber governess. He stopped and looked at her. It was not that she had grown pale, for she was ever that, fixedly pale, but a sort of ashen gray shadow had crept up over brow and chin, like a waxen mask. For one instant her lips parted, her eyes dilated, then, as if by magic, all signs of change disappeared. Miss Herncastle was herself again, smiling upon her startled companion with her face of marble calm.

"A neuralgic twinge, Sir Arthur." She put her hand to her forehead. "I am subject to them. No—no, you are very kind, but there is no need to look concerned. I am quite used to it, and it only means I have taken a slight cold."

"And we stood here in a draught of night air. Shall I close the window, Miss Herncastle?"

"And shut out this sweet evening wind, with the scent of the sea and the roses? No, Sir Arthur; I may not be very sentimental or romantic—my days for all that are past—but I think a more practical person than myself might brave a cold in the head and a twinge of *tic douloureux*, for such a breeze and such a prospect as this."

"At least, then, permit me to get you a shawl."

He left her before she could expostulate. She caught her breath for a moment—hard, then leaned forward and listened to the low-spoken words of Lady Cecil.

"Your grandfather's heiress," she was repeating, interestedly. "Ah! yes, I remember, you told me that also once before."

"Did I? I'll tell you the sequel now, if you like," the Chasseur d'Afrique said. "There is many a slip, you know, and old Frenchmen sometimes have youthful hearts. M. De Lansac suddenly and unexpectedly got married, six years ago—Master Claude is four years old now, the finest little fellow from here to New Orleans, the heir of Menadarva, and the De Lansac millions. After her grandfather's marriage—I don't know how it was either—she and madame always seemed excellent friends, but Marie fell into low spirits and ill health, pined for the green hills of Ulster, and the feudal splendor of Castle O'Donnell—perhaps you remember that venerable pile, Lady Cecil—and wrote me to come and fetch her home. Her grandfather did not wish it. I did not wish it. I could give

her no home equal in any way to that she wished to leave; but when a woman will, she will, and all the rest of it. Marie De Lansac, like Marianne in the Moated Grange, was 'aweary, aweary.' The result of many letters, and much feminine logic, was, that I obtained six months' leave of absence, sailed the briny seas and—Finis."

"Not Finis, Captain O'Donnell; there is still a supplement. How is it you chanced to appear before us so suddenly here?"

"Ask Rose," Captain O'Donnell answered. "I never pretend to fathom the motives that sway the feminine intellect. She wanted to come to London—we came to London. She wanted to come to Castleford, Sussex—we came to Castleford, Sussex. *Why*, I don't know, and I am not sure that I have any curiosity on the subject. Probably Rose knows, just as probably though she does not. As well Sussex as anywhere else. I received and obeyed orders. And"—Captain O'Donnell paused a moment and glanced up at the fair, starry face on which the cold moonbeams shone—"and I can truly say I don't regret the coming."

He flung away his cigar and sprang to his feet. Lady Dangerfield, with her major, approached at the moment.

"Queenie, are you aware the dew is falling, and that night air is shocking for the complexion? A little moonlight is very nice, but enough is enough, I judge. Come into the house; we are going to have loo and music."

She swept toward the open windows, her trained dress brushing the dew off the wet grass, and her eyes fell upon the two tall, dusk, statuesque figures there full in the moonlight. And over my lady's face an angry frown swept, and from my lady's eyes a flash of haughty displeasure shot.

"*You* here still, Miss Herncastle?" she said, in a voice of verjuice. "I imagined when the music ceased that you had gone to your room. Are you aware whether Pansy and Pearl have gone to bed? Be kind enough to go at once and ascertain."

"And remain when you go," the frown that concluded the command said.

She swept by them, her shining laces wafting a cloud of millefleurs before and behind her, and Major Frankland, with a knowing half-smile on his lips, stalked after like the statue of the commander.

Miss Herncastle fell back—one appealing, deprecating, wistful look she cast upon Sir Arthur.

"Good-night," she sighed, rather than said, and was gone.

Lady Dangerfield was wise in her generation, but she had made a mistake to-night. A sudden dark anger had swept into the baronet's eyes, a flush of intolerable anger mounted to his brow. The lady he "delighted to honor" had been insulted, had been ordered from *his* presence and out of his room be cause—he understood well enough—because of him. His face changed, so darkly, so sternly, so angrily, that you saw how terrible this man, usually so calm and impassive, could be in wrath.

The rest of the party entered by the other windows. The lamps were lit, and Lady Dangerfield's voice came shrilly summoning the baronet to loo.

"We are four—Major Frankland, Miss O'Donnell, Captain O'Donnell, and myself. We want you, Sir Arthur, to make up our table."

"Your ladyship will hold me excused. I have no wish for cards to-night."

The iced stateliness of that tone no words of mine can tell.

Sir Arthur left his window, looking unutterably grim and awful, strode down the long room, flung himself into a chair, took up a photograph album and immersed himself instantly fathoms deep in art.

Lady Cecil Clive, seated at the piano in the dim distance, heard, saw, and smiled. My lady's stare of angry amaze, Sir Arthur's grimly, sulky face were irresistible. As she glanced across the drawing-room, she encountered another pair of laughing eyes, that met and answered her own. Very handsome, very bright, very bold, blue eyes they were, in the head of *Le Beau Chasseur*. What *rapport* was there between these two? Without speaking a word, they understood each other thoroughly.

Sir Arthur Tregenna might wrap himself up in his dignity as in a mantle, and sulk to his heart's content; Lady Cecil might hold herself aloof, and play dreamy, sweet sonatas and German waltzes, looking like a modern Saint Cecilia; the Earl of Ruysland might still slumber in that peaceful way which a quiet conscience and a sound digestion give; Sir Peter might entomb himself in his study or make his nightly pilgrimage to Castleford—but the loo party were the merriest party imaginable.

Miss Herncastle appeared no more, of course; Lady Cecil played on and on—Sir Arthur gazed and gazed at his pictures,

and never approached the piano. He had got hold of a picture—Joan of Arc before her judges, and his eyes never left it. The face was strangely like that of Miss Herncastle—the expression of the great grave eyes, the compression of the sensitive mouth, the turn of the brow, the shape of the chin. And that night when Sir Arthur Tregenna went up to his room, he carried Joan of Arc with him.

It wanted just a quarter of twelve when Redmond O'Donnell left Scarswood Park, and took his way on foot to the town. He had been offered a horse, he had been offered a bed, and had declined both. To walk on such a night was a luxury. He lit a Manilla, and went over the moonlit road with his long cavalryman's stride. It was a perfect night, the sky small blue, the stars golden and glorious, the moon sailing up serene in their shiny midst. Long shadows of tall trees lay black across the road, the hedge-rows in full blossom made the night air odorous, and, far or near, no living thing was to be seen.

Far or near! Redmond O'Donnell pulled up suddenly in his swinging pace, and looked away afield. His sight was of eagle keenness. What dark moving figure was that yonder, crossing a stile, and vanishing amid the tall gorse? It was a woman—more, it was familiar even at that distance.

In a moment his resolution was taken. What woman was this out for a midnight ramble? She must have come straight from Scarswood, there was no other habitation near. Captain O'Donnell set his lips, flung away his cigar among the fern and grasses, vaulted like a boy over the hedge, and in a moment was in full pursuit.

The figure that had vanished in the shadows of the waving gorse, reappeared in the broad moonlit field. A woman—no doubt about that now—a tall woman, walking swiftly, lightly, gracefully, as only young women ever walk. That stately stature, that poise of the head and shoulders, surely all were familiar. And a quarter past twelve, alone and in haste. What mystery was here?

"Some instinct told me six hours ago, when I recognized her first, that something was wrong; I am convinced of it now. Something *is* wrong. What brings her here?—of all people in the world, and in the character of a nursery governess. And where is she going at this unearthly hour of night?"

Still she went on—still the unseen pursuer followed on her track. She never looked back; straight, swift, as one who has some fixed end in view, she went on; and still steady and re-

lentless, determined and stern, Redmond O'Donnell followed in her track.

Her destination was Bracken Hollow. It came upon him, seen for the first time, black and grim, buried among its gloomy trees—lonely and deserted. No lights gleamed anywhere about it; its shutters were all closed—unutterably eerie and desolate in the white shimmer of the moon. But the nocturnal visitor opened the grim wooden gate with a key she carried, relocked it, and for the first time paused to look back. She saw no one—the trees, and the shades, and the distance hid the pursuer; only the silver shine of the stars and moon, the boundless blue of sky, the spreading green of earth, and the soft night wind whispering over all. She turned from the gate, hurried up the grass-grown path, and vanished in the inky gloom of the porch.

Redmond O'Donnell emerged from the shadow of the trees, and approached the gruesome dwelling. He paused at the wooden gate, which barred his farther advance, and gazed up at the black forbidding front. In his rambles over the neighborhood he had never come upon this out-of-the-way place—it lay in a spot so remote, so unfrequented, that few ever did come upon it by chance. And those who knew it gave it a wide berth, for it bore the ghastly reputation of a haunted house.

He stood, his folded arms resting on the gate, tall sycamores and firs burying him in their deepest gloom, and watched and waited for—he hardly knew what. Certainly not for what he heard—a long, wailing cry that came suddenly and hideously from the upper part of the house.

He started up. So blood-curdling, so unexpected was it, that for one moment his heart gave a great bound. It was followed by another, wild, agonized—then dead silence fell.

Physically and morally Redmond O'Donnell was brave to the core, and had given many and strong proofs of his bravery; but a chill, more like fear than anything he had ever experienced, fell upon him now. What hideous thing was this? Was murder being done in this spectral house? It looked a fit place for a murder—all darkness, all silence, all desolation. The unearthly cry was the same that once before had terrified Lady Cecil, but of that circumstance he knew nothing. What deed of evil was going on within these dark walls? Should he force an entrance and see? Would that dreadful cry be repeated? He paused and listened—five, ten, fifteen minutes

No, dead silence reigned. Only the flutter of the leaves, and the chirp of some bird in its nest, the soft rustle of the trees, the faint soughing of the wind—the "voices" of the night—nothing more.

What ought he do? While he still stood there irresolute, lost in wonder and a sort of awe, the porch door opened, and the mysterious lady he had followed appeared. A second figure, the bent figure of a very old woman, came after. The first was speaking.

"No, no, Hannah; you shall not come. Afraid! What nonsense! The time for me to fear anything earthly is past. Nothing living or dead will harm me. I will reach Scarswood in less than three-quarters of an hour, get in as I got out, in spite of all Sir Peter's chains and locks, and to-morrow be once more my lady's staid preceptress of youth. Hannah, Hannah, what a life it is! Go back; try to keep everything quiet; don't let these ghastly shrieks be repeated if you can help it. How fortunate Bracken Hollow is thought to be haunted, and no one ever comes here by night or day!"

"We had a narrow escape not long ago, for all that. It was one of the bad days, and the lady and gentleman heard. I put them off, but it may happen again, and it will. It can't go on forever."

"Nothing goes on forever; I don't want it to go on forever. My time is drawing near; little by little the light is breaking, and *my* day is coming. Until it does, keep quiet; use the drug if there's too much noise. I will return as speedily as possible. Now, good-night."

She ran down the steps, walked with her firm, resolute, fearless tread, down the path, and, as before, lingered a second or two at the gate.

The old woman had gone back to the house, and the tall, dark figure under the firs she did not see. She drew out her watch and looked at it by the light of the moon.

"Half-past one!" she murmured. "I had not thought it so late. It will be a quarter past two, then, before I reach Scarswood."

"And a very late hour for Miss Herncastle to be out alone!"

Obeying an impulse he could not resist, the *chasseur* emerged from the tree-shadows and stood before her.

"With her permission I will see her safely back."

And then, with the bright light of the moon upon his face,

Redmond O'Donnell removed his hat and bowed to Miss Herncastle.

---

## CHAPTER XIV.

### UNDER THE KING'S OAK.

SHE did not scream, she did not even start. There must have been brave blood in the governess' veins. She stood there stock still, and faced him; but in the moonlight that gray pallor came over the resolute face, and the great gray eyes dilated with something the look of a hunted stag. So for an instant they stood silent, face to face, he with the brilliant, slanting moonbeams full on his dark, handsome, uncovered head, and his piercing, blue eyes pitilessly fixed on her stony face. Then the spell broke; she drew one long breath, the light came back to her eyes, the natural hue to her face, and she nerved herself to meet and dare the worst. She was one of those exceptional women who possess courage, that rises to battle back in the hour of danger. She opened the gate and spoke.

"Captain Redmond O'Donnell," she said slowly, "it is *you*. I breathe again. For one moment I absolutely took you for a ghost. My nerves are good, but you gave them a shock."

"Yes," Captain O'Donnell dryly answered. "I think your nerves *are* good, Miss Herncastle. There are not many young ladies—not many strong-minded governesses even—who would fancy the long, lonely walk between Scarswood and this place, between the ghostly hours of twelve and two. You are going back? As I said before, with your permission, I will accompany you. Under existing circumstances it becomes my duty to see you safely home."

She smiled, came out, relocked the gate, put the key in her pocket, drew the black mantle she wore closely about her and walked on.

"Your duty?" she repeated, still with that smile. "Duty is a word with a wide signification to some people. For instance, no doubt you considered it your duty to follow me here to-night—to dog my steps, like the hireling assassin of an

Italian novel—to (it is not a pleasant word, but the word I want) play the spy."

He was walking by her side. He was lowering the pasture bars of a field as she spoke, to let her through.

"Spy?" he said. "Well, yes, I confess it looks like it. Still in justice to myself and my motives, let me say something more than simple curiosity has been at work to-night. In the usual course of events, though it might surprise me to see Lady Dangerfield's governess taking a moonlight ramble after midnight, it certainly would not induce me to follow her, and play the spy, as you term it, upon her actions. But another motive than curiosity prompted me to-night—to dog your footsteps, to wait for your reappearance, and to accompany you home."

"Ah, something more! May I ask what it is that induces Captain O'Donnell to take so profound an interest in one so far beneath him as Lady Dangerfield's governess?"

The grave defiance of her tone and manner, the daring mockery of her glance, told him she was prepared to deny everything—to fight every inch of the ground.

"Well, Miss Herncastle," he said, "my first impression when I recognized you—for your carriage, your walk, your bearing, are not to be mistaken anywhere—"

Miss Herncastle bowed sarcastically, as to a compliment.

"My *first* impression, I say, was that you were walking in your sleep. I knew a somnambulist in Algeria who would walk miles every night, if not locked up. But a little thought, and a few minutes' cautious pursuit convinced me that you were not sleep-walking, but exceedingly wide awake indeed."

Again Miss Herncastle bowed—again with that derisive, defiant smile on her face. Her whole look, manner, and tone were entirely unlike Miss Herncastle, who seemed more like an animated statue than a living woman in my lady's spacious rooms.

"And being convinced of that, Captain O'Donnell's first impulse—the impulse of all brave men and gallant gentlemen, was—'Miss Herncastle is out for a walk by herself, either on private business, or because of the beauty of the night, or because she cannot sleep. She certainly doesn't want me, and is quite capable of taking care of herself. I will turn back at once and think no more about it.' That was, I know, the first thought of Captain O'Donnell, the bravest chasseur in all the army of Africa. May I ask why he did not act upon it?"

"Simply for this reason—that Captain O'Donnell recognized Miss Herncastle at six o'clock last evening, as she stood upon the lawn reading the 'Battle of Fontenoy.'"

"Indeed!" Miss Herncastle responded, with supreme indifference; "recognized me, did you? I am rather surprised at that. You encountered me in the streets of London probably before I came here?"

"No, madame, I encountered you in the streets of a very different city. I have an excellent memory for faces, and though I may be puzzled to place them for a little, I generally come out right in the end."

"I congratulate Captain O'Donnell on his excellent memory. And my face puzzled you at first, did it? and you have come out all right in the end?"

"Carry your memory back to the night of the theatricals at Scarswood, the night of my first appearing there. I saw you play Charlotte Corday, and in common with all present, your manner of enacting it electrified me. More, I *knew* immediately that I had seen you before, and in somewhat similar circumstances. I asked who you were, and was told Lady Dangerfield's nursery governess. That nonplussed me—my recollections of you were altogether unreconcilable with the character of children's preceptress. Then came last evening, and your very fine rendering of the Irish poem. And again I was puzzled. Your face was perfectly familiar—your attitude, your voice, your action—but *where* had I seen you? Do you remember Lady Cecil's exclamation?—'Miss Herncastle, you are a born actress!' Like mist before the sun, the haze of my mind was swept away, and I knew you. I repeat it, Miss Herncastle—*I knew you.*"

"You knew me?" Miss Herncastle repeated, but her eyes were gleaming strangely now; "well, sir, you know nothing to my discredit, I hope?"

"Nothing to your discredit, if you have told Lady Dangerfield the truth. But baronets' wives rarely look for their children's instructresses in the person of —— a New York actress."

"Captain O'Donnell!"

"Miss Herncastle!"

And then there was a pause, and for an instant *how* horribly thick and fast Miss Herncastle's heart beat only Miss Herncastle ever knew.

"I don't understand you," she said; but in spite of all her

great self-command her voice sounded husky. "A New York actress. I never was in New York in my life. I am an Englishwoman, born and bred."

*If* he would only take his eyes off her face, she thought her defiant spirit would rise again. But those powerful blue eyes, keen as a knife, bright as steel, seemed to pierce her very soul, and read all its falsehood there.

"I regret Miss Herncastle takes the trouble to make unnecessary statements," he said coldly. "An Englishwoman born and bred. I believe *that*. But as surely as we both stand here, I saw you six months ago on a New York stage—one of the most popular actresses of that city."

She was silent—her lips set hard—that hunted look in her large eyes.

"The play was 'Hamlet,'" pursued the pitiless voice of the chasseur; "and the great trans-Atlantic actor, Edwin Booth, played the doleful Prince of Denmark. I had never seen 'Hamlet,' and I went the first night of my arrival in New York. The *Ophelia* of the play was a tall, black-browed, majestic woman, who acted superbly, and who looked as if she could take care of herself; but then all American women have that look. At least she was very far from one's idea of poor love-sick, song-singing, weak-minded Ophelia; and I really think she took the character better than any actress I ever saw; but then my experience has been limited. Miss Herncastle, I don't remember the name of that actress on the bills, but I certainly have the honor of walking by her side to-night. No," —he lifted his hand hastily, "I beg you will not trouble yourself to deny this. What good will it do? You can't convince me though you denied it until daylight. I know I speak the truth."

She turned to him with sudden impulse—sudden passion in her face. Ah! that is where women fail—where men have the advantage of us. The strongest-minded of us will let ourselves be swayed by impulse, and all the vows and resolves of our life swept away in the passion of a moment. She turned to him with a swift, impassioned gesture of both hands, theatrical perhaps, but real.

"Why should I lie to you! You are a man of honor, a soldier, and a gentleman—you will not betray me. I will tell the truth, Captain O'Donnell. I *am* the New York actress—I *am* the Ophelia you beheld six months ago."

"I knew it," he answered with composure. "I saw you

many nights in succession It was impossible for me to be mistaken. And as clever and popular actresses do not as a rule quit the stage, and the brilliant, well-paid, well-dressed, highly strung existence of a popular leading lady, and merge their bright individuality into that of a poorly paid, overtasked drudge of a nursery governess, you will pardon me, I think, for allowing my suspicions to rise, for following your footsteps to-night. I said to myself, this actress, whom a crowded Broadway house applauded to the echo, night after night, has some motive—a sinister one, in all likelihood—in quitting her profession and coming to this house in the *rôle* of governess. For, of course, a governess she will not long remain. Lady Dangerfield is in utter ignorance of her antecedents—believes whatever story Miss Herncastle chooses to tell her—takes her recommendations, forged beyond doubt, for authentic documents, and is being duped every day. I speak plainly, you see, Miss Herncastle."

"You do, indeed," Miss Herncastle answered bitterly "You state your case with all the pitiless grimness and truth of the stern old judge on the bench, summing up the facts that are to condemn for life the miserable culprit in the dock. And after all," she flung up her hand, her eyes flashing, "what business is it of yours? Are you my lady's keeper? Has your own fate been ordered so smoothly that you should hunt down to ruin a poor wretch with whom life has gone hard?"

Something in her tone moved him—something in that passionate, savage, hunted look of her eyes touched him, he hardly knew why.

"No, God knows," he said sadly, "my own life has been no pathway of roses. I am the last man on earth to set up in judgment upon my struggling fellow mortal, and accuse him. I have no wish to hunt you down, as you call it. This night's work, this night's discovery, and your avowal, shall be as though they had never been. Whether I do right or wrong in concealing the truth is much too subtle a question for me—I only know I will conceal it."

She held out her hand suddenly, with a second swift impulse. "For that much at least I thank you. Why I have left the stage, why I have come here, you have answered to your own satisfaction. Some sinister motive *must* be at the bottom, of course. And yet, Captain O'Donnell—and yet—can you imagine no better, no higher, no more worthy motive? The one may be brilliant, the other dull; one well-paid, well-

dressed, well-applauded; the other a pittance—quaker garb, and the obedience of a servant; but yet the dull life is the safe one—the other full of untold dangers and temptation."

Captain O'Donnell smiled.

"I grant it. Full of untold dangers and temptation to foolish girls and frivolous matrons—*not* to such women as you. In any situation in life you are quite capable of taking excellent care of yourself, Miss Herncastle. That plea has not even the advantage of being commonly plausible. What your motive may be, I don't know—it is your own business and in no way concerns me. Unless," he paused—"unless, Miss Herncastle—" he said, slowly.

"Yes, Captain O'Donnell—unless—"

"Unless I find trouble of any kind coming of it. You are doing mischief already—do you know it? You have frightened two or three people into the belief that you are a ghost."

Miss Herncastle laughed—not a very natural-sounding laugh.

"Poor little Sir Peter! Is it my fault, Captain O'Donnell, that I resemble some woman he has known, dead and in her grave?"

"Perhaps not; I have not quite made up my mind how that is yet. Second clause—" he gave her a piercing look; "are you aware that Sir Arthur Tregenna is engaged—has been engaged for years—to Lady Cecil Clive?"

"Ah," Miss Herncastle said, scornfully, "*now* we tread on delicate ground. Sir Arthur Tregenna is engaged to Lady Cecil Clive, and Sir Arthur Tregenna has shown the despised nursery governess the simple courtesy of a gentleman to a gentlewoman. For, in spite of the New York acting and English teaching, I am that, sir! He has kindly talked a little to Miss Herncastle, and the earl's daughter deigns to be jealous, with all her beauty, and birth, and breeding, of poor, lowly, plain me. And you, Captain O'Donnell—you of all men—tell me of it."

"And why not I, Miss Herncastle?"

"Because," she burst out, fiercely, passionately, "Lady Cecil Clive may be engaged to fifty wealthy baronets, but—*she loves you!* Ah! you feel that!" She laughed in a wild, reckless sort of way. "She loves you, the soldier of fortune, the free companion, and will give Sir Arthur her hand at the altar, while her heart is in *your* keeping! And this is the dainty, the spotless, the proud Lady Cecil. What you are or have been to her in the past, you know best; but—I wonder if Sir Arthur does? He is a faithful friend and gallant gentleman. Don't you think

Captain O'Donnell, my judge, my censor, that from your hands and hers he deserves better than that?"

She had struck home. The tide of battle had turned—victory sat perched on her banner now. His face flushed deep red, under the golden bronze of an Afric sun, then grew very white. Miss Herncastle, womanlike, pursued her advantage mercilessly.

"You see the mote in your brother's eye, but how about the beam in your own? Most men like to think the heart of the woman they marry has held no former lodger. They like to think so, and if in nine cases out of ten they are duped, if they do not know it, what does it matter? My Lady Cecil is pure and spotless as mountain snow, is she not? And she sells herself—it is my turn to use plain words now, sir—sells herself for Sir Arthur's thirty thousand a year. She is the soul of truth and a living lie to him every day of her life. She will become his wife, and her heart will go after you out to Algiers. Yours she is—and will be—and Sir Arthur trusts her and you. Bah! Captain O'Donnell, is there one true woman or man in all the world wide? I don't say Sir Arthur has any right to complain—he is only treated as the larger half of his sex are treated; but don't *you* call him to order if he chances to speak a few kindly words to me. We are at the park; may I go in? I am tired to death, walking and talking. Has more got to be said, or shall we cry quits, and say good-night?"

"How will you get in?" he asked. "The doors and windows seem bolted for the night."

"Doubly bolted, doubly barred," Miss Herncastle replied with a contemptuous laugh, "to keep out burglars and ghosts, the two bugbears of Sir Peter's life. Nevertheless I will get in Good-night, Captain O'Donnell." She held out her hand. "I would rather you had not followed me, but you thought you were doing your duty, and I do not blame you. Shall we cry quits, or shall it be war to the knife?"

He touched the ungloved hand she extended and dropped it coldly.

"It shall be whatever Miss Herncastle pleases. Only I should advise her to discontinue those nocturnal rambles. She may get followed again, and by some one less discreet even than myself, and the very strange cries that issue from that mysterious dwelling be found out."

She caught her breath; she had quite forgotten Bracken Hollow.

"You heard—"

"I heard three very unearthly cries, Miss Herncastle. I shall inquire to-morrow who lives in that house.

"Do. You will hear it is an old woman, a very old, harmless woman, but a little, just a little, in her dotage. These moonlight nights affect her, and when her rheumatism twinges come on she cries out as you have heard her."

He smiled as he listened.

"You don't believe me?" she exclaimed. "You think I am telling a second lie."

"My dear Miss Herncastle," the chasseur replied, "we never apply that forcible and impolite word to a lady. And now, as you seem tired, and lest poachers and game-keepers should see us, I think we had better part. You are quite sure you can get in?"

"Quite sure. Good-night, Captain O'Donnell."

He lifted his hat and turned at once. Miss Herncastle stood where he had left her, following the tall, gallant figure that crossed the moonlit field so swiftly, with a strange expression in her eyes and on her lips. Not anger, certainly not hatred, whatever it might be. She stood there until he was out of sight, until the last sound of rapid footsteps on the distant highroad died away. Then she turned, entered the great elm avenue, and disappeared.

---

It was the next night after this that something very strange and very startling occurred to Sir Peter Dangerfield.

Beside his sunset pilgrimage to that remote Castleford churchyard, the Scarswood baronet made other pilgrimages to Castleford, by no means so harmless. In an out-of-the-way street of the town there stood a tall, white house, set in a garden off the highway, and looking the very picture of peace and prosperity. A gentleman named Dubourg, of foreign extraction, and his wife, resided there. M. Dubourg was a most agreeable gentleman, Madame Dubourg the most charming, most vivacious, and, when artistically made up for the evening, the prettiest of little women. Perhaps it was owing to the charm of those agreeable people's society that so many officers of the Castleford barracks, and so many of the dashing young country squires, frequented it. Or, perhaps—but this was a secret—perhaps it was owing to the unlimited loo and lansquenet, the *écarté* and chicken-hazard you might indulge in between nightfall and sunrise. For lights burned behind those closed vene-

tians the short summer and the long winter nights through, and men sat silent and with pale faces until the rosy lances of sunrise pierced the blinds, and the fall of the cards and the rattle of dice were the only sound to stir the silence. Immense sums were staked, little fortunes were lost and won, and men left haggard and ghastly in the gray dawn, with the cold dew standing on their faces, or rode home flushed, excited, richer by thousands of pounds. The Castleford police kept their eye on this peaceful suburban retreat and the delightful Monsieur and Madame Dubourg, but as yet no raid had been made.

A passion for gambling had ever been latent in the Dangerfield blood. In the days of his poverty it had developed itself in his continual buying of lottery tickets; in the days of his prosperity, at the gaming-table. Insect-hunting might be his hobby—chicken-hazard was his passion. Of the sums he lost and won there Lady Dangerfield knew nothing; *her* apartments were in the other wing of Scarswood. Of the unearthly hours of his return home no one knew but the head groom, who sat up for him and took his horse, and was well paid for his silence and his service. As a rule, Sir Peter's losses and gains were pretty equal; he was an adept at chicken-hazard, and no more skilled gamester frequented the place.

On the night then following Miss Herncastle's adventure, Sir Peter rode gayly homeward at a much earlier hour than usual, the richer by six hundred pounds. He was in high good spirits —for *him;* the night was lovely—bright as day and twice as beautiful. In his elation all his constitutional dread of ghosts, of "black spirits and white, blue spirits and gray," vanished, and he was actually trying to whistle a shrill little tune as he scrambled along. The clocks of Castleford, plainly heard in the stillness, were striking twelve as the baronet entered his own domain and rode up the avenue.

What was that?

His horse had shied so suddenly as nearly to throw him off. They were near a huge oak, called the King's Oak, from the legend that the young Pretender had once taken refuge there from his pursuers. Its great branches cast shadows for yards around. And slowly out of those gloomy shadows—a figure came—a white figure, with streaming hair, and face upturned to the starry sky. All in white—true ghostly garments—noiseless, slow, it glided out and stood full in his pathway.

The bright, cold light of the moon shone full upon it, and he saw—the dead face of Katherine Dangerfield!

Katherine Dangerfield! Not a doubt of it. Who should know the face better than he? as he used to see her long ago in her white dress and flowing hair. Katherine Dangerfield, with a face of stone upturned to the midnight sky.

He sat frozen for a moment—frozen with a horror too intense for words or cry. *Then* the startled horse shied again, and a shriek rang out in the midnight stillness, those who heard might never forget. The horse plunged madly forward, and there was the sound of a heavy fall.

The groom, half asleep at his post, rushed out; two or three dogs barked loudly in their kennels. The groom rushed forward and seized the horse, quivering with affright. He was riderless. At a little distance lay Sir Peter, face downward, on the dewy grass, like a dead man. And nothing else earthly or unearthly was anywhere to be seen.

---

## CHAPTER XV.

### "AS IN A GLASS, DARKLY."

THE groom echoed his master's cry as he stooped and lifted him up. He was senseless; he had struck his forehead on a stone, and was bleeding freely. It was an awfully ghastly face upon which the moonlight shone.

The double alarm had been heard. In five minutes another of the grooms, sleeping over the stable, came running to the spot.

"T' maister hurt," groom number one explained; "been flung off his horse. Gi' us a hand here, my lad, and help us lift him oop and carry him into house"

They bore the stark and bleeding form between them, found his night-key in his pocket, opened the door and carried him up to his own room. One or two of the servants appeared—the alarm was speeding through the household.

"Best tell my lady," some one said; "and, Davis, hadn't thee better go to Castleford for a surgeon?"

Both suggestions were acted on; my lady was summoned, very much startled and very peevish at being disturbed in her "beauty sleep."

"And what could *she* do?" she fretfully asked. "Of what use was it summoning her?"

All was confusion, servants standing nonplussed, my lady's only emotion, as she stood in her flowing white wrapper, gazing with much disfavor at the bleeding face and motionless figure, one of anger at being routed out. The groom had gone for the surgeon; pending the surgeon's arrival, nothing seemed likely to be done. In the midst of the "confusion worse confounded" appeared upon the scene Miss Herncastle, also in a wrapper, alarmed by the noise, and carrying a night-lamp in her hand.

"Oh, Miss Herncastle!" my lady exclaimed, "perhaps *you* may know what to do. I am sure I don't, and it was most inconsiderate awakening me in this manner, when my nights are so broken, and with my shattered nerves and all. And then the sight of blood always makes me sick. Perhaps you can do something for Sir Peter; he has had a fall off his horse, and seems to be stunned. I don't believe he is killed. I wish you would see, and if it's not dangerous I'll go back to bed." My lady shivered in the chill night air; the great rooms and long corridors of Scarswood were draughty. "I would stay with pleasure, of course, if there was any real danger, or if Sir Peter were dying, or that kind of thing, but I *know* he is not."

"I dare say you would," more than one of the servants present thought, as they listened to this wifely speech, and smiled furtively. "If Sir Peter were dying, my lady, you *would* stay with pleasure."

Miss Herncastle's calm, pale face, looking more marble-like than ever in the fitful lamplight, bent over the rigid little baronet. She felt his pulse, she wiped away the blood with a wet sponge and discovered the trifling nature of the cut, and turned to my lady.

"Sir Peter is in a fainting fit, I think, my lady; probably, too, stunned by the shock of his fall. The wound is nothing, a mere scratch. There is not the slightest danger, I am sure, and not the slightest necessity for your remaining here. In your delicate state of health you may get your death of cold." My lady had never been sick two hours in her whole life. "Permit me to urge you to retire, Lady Dangerfield. *I* will remain and do all that is necessary."

"Very well, Miss Herncastle, I believe I must. I fear I shall be ill as it is after the shock; my nervous system feels completely unstrung. If there should be any danger I beg you will send me word the very first thing in the morning."

And then my lady, with a wretched expression of coun tenance, wended her way back to bed, and Miss Herncastle had charge of the lord of Scarswood. She dismissed all the gaping servants, with one or two exceptions—the housekeeper and a man—and set to work with the air of one who under-stood her business. She bathed his face and temples with ice-water; she slapped his palms; she applied sal-volatile and burnt feathers to his nostrils; and presently there was a flutter of the colorless eyelashes, a tremor all over the body, and Sir Peter's small, near-sighted, pale blue eyes opened and fixed on Miss Herncastle.

"My dear Sir Peter, how do you feel now?" the soft, sweet tones of that most soft, sweet voice asked. "Better, I sincerely trust!"

He had not known her at first; he blinked and stared help-lessly in the lamplight; but at the second look, the sound o' her voice, an awful expression of horror swept over his coun tenance; he gave another wild cry of affright, half-started up, and fell back senseless once again.

It was really a tragic scene. All the exertions of the gover-ness failed to restore him this second time. The moments dragged on; the housekeeper (not Mrs. Harrison of Sir John's reign, *en passant;* she had left upon her master's death) and the butler sat dumb and awe-stricken. Miss Herncastle never wearied in well-doing, applied her restoratives incessantly, until at last, as all the clocks in Scarswood were chiming the half hour after three, the groom and the surgeon came.

The surgeon was a young man, a new practitioner, and con-sidered very skilful. He brought Sir Peter round for the second time, presently, and once more the baronet's eyes opened to the light of the lamps, and the moon streaming in through the bars of the venetians.

He stared around, bewildered, his face still keeping its ex-pression of horror, his eyes fixed on the faces of the physician, the housekeeper, and the butler. Then he spoke in an awe stricken whisper:

"Where is *she?*".

"Who?" It was the surgeon who asked. "Whom do you mean, my dear Sir Peter?—Lady Dangerfield?"

"I mean Katherine Dangerfield."

The young doctor had heard that story, stranger though he was—had heard of Sir Peter's delusive and ghostly belief, and shook his head.

"There is no such person here, my dear Sir Peter! Your mind is still—"

Sir Peter raised himself up on his elbow, with a sort of scorn.

"I tell you I saw her—saw her twice! Don't talk to me of my mind, you fool! I saw her! She came—oh, Heaven!—she came and stood before me out there under the trees, all in white, her hair flowing, and her dead eyes turned up to the stars! I saw her! I saw her! and I live to tell it! And five minutes ago I opened my eyes and saw her again, her dead eyes, her stern face looking over the bed!"

The young doctor recoiled. Had Sir Peter gone entirely mad?

Mrs. Butler, the housekeeper, came forward—a genteel creature, and the widow of a curate.

"My *dear* Sir Peter, you alarm yourself unnecessarily. I assure you"—Mrs. Butler reveled in words of three syllables—"it was the governess, Miss Herncastle, whom you beheld a few minutes ago when consciousness returned. My dear Miss Herncastle, pray come forward and corroborate my assurance."

Miss Herncastle, hovering aloof in the moonlight and the shadows, came slowly forward, speaking as she came.

"I am sorry to have startled Sir Peter by my unfortunate resemblance to his dead relative. Mrs. Butler is right; it was I you saw a few moments ago, Sir Peter."

He sat up in bed gazing upon her, the wild look of horror dying slowly out of his wizzen, little, pinched face, and an abject look of fear coming in its place. Her eyes were fixed upon him, steadily, strongly, intensely. What mesmeric power was there in those calm gray eyes to subdue him to her will?

"Lie down, Sir Peter," she said very gently, "and let me give you some medicine. Will you not order him a sedative, a composing draught, Mr. Weymore? I am sure he needs it. I will administer it, and will watch, with Mrs. Butler, until morning."

The young doctor obeyed. He prepared the sedative, and Miss Herncastle administered it. Sir Peter took it from her hand, spell-bound it seemed, unable to refuse, unable to take his fascinated eyes off her face. Then he lay back; she arranged his pillows, smoothed the coverlet, made him comfortable, as only a deft-handed woman can. All the time his eyes never left her face—all the time he never uttered a word. The spell of some mesmeric force was upon him, and rendered him obedient to her will.

Mr. Weymore, the Castleford surgeon, took his departure.

"Nothing ailed Sir Peter but shattered nerves; he wanted rest, repose, tonics, cheerful society, entire change of air. He saw," he said, "he left him in excellent hands," with a glance of admiration at the calm, serene young lady. "He would go now, and call early the ensuing forenoon. Good-night, Miss Herncastle." And Mr. Weymore, with a second admiring glance at that Juno-like form and grave, thoughtful face, took his hat and his departure.

The sedative had its effect—Sir Peter fell asleep, Mrs. Butler nodded in her easy chair, Miss Herncastle drew the curtains, raised the blind, seated herself by the window, and with her chin on her hand, looked out. It was past four; the waning moon was dropping pale out of sight in the west, the eastern sky was flushing and brightening already with the beauty and splendor of a new-born summer day. The tall trees stood motionless, the waving grass and cowslips were glistening with dew, long silver lances of light pierced the mysterious green depths of waving fern. It was beautiful—beautiful. Of what did Miss Herncastle think as she sat there with somber face and duskily brooding eyes? After days darkly told.

Sir Peter fell into a deep, refreshing, natural sleep as the morning wore on. Some time after sunrise Lady Cecil entered, hearing for the first time of what had occurred, and offered in her kindly, gentle way to take Miss Herncastle's place. Very haggard in the rosy brightness of the July sunrise Miss Herncastle looked, her eyes heavy, her cheeks pale.

"Go to your room at once," Lady Cecil said. "You look quite worn out. Pray, do not attempt teaching to-day. After you have slept and breakfasted go for a long walk. You need it, I am sure."

She murmured her thanks and went. And Lady Cecil, with the upper housemaid for companion, took her vacated post. My lady still slumbered—her wretched nerves *always* required her to lie abed until eleven o'clock.

The news spread, as such news is pretty sure to do. By noon that day all Castleford knew that Sir Peter, riding home at midnight (pretty hour for a magistrate and a baronet to be gadding), had beheld Katherine Dangerfield's ghost under the trees of Scarswood, had fallen from his horse in a fit, had struck his temple on a stone, and now lay at Death's door, if he had not already entered that gloomy portal. The news spread—it

was the talk of the town, and among others came to the ears of Captain O'Donnell.

"Saw a ghost," the chasseur thought, knitting his brows, in a reflective frown: "what fooling is this? Saw Katherine Dangerfield—Humph! Has somebody been playing a practical joke at the superstitious little baronet's expense, I wonder? I'll walk over and see."

He walked down. It was past three when he reached Scarswood. On the grounds he encountered Lady Cecil Clive and the twins out for a holiday. He joined the trio at once.

"Good-morning, Lady Cecil. *Bon jour, mesdemoiselles. Pansey et Pearl.* Lady Cecil, what ghastly news is it that is galvanizing all Castleford? I don't understand it. Sir Peter has seen a ghost."

"So Sir Peter says, Captain O'Donnell; and who should know better? He had been somewhere in Castleford until close upon midnight, the traditional ghostly hour, and riding up the avenue he saw the ghost of Katherine Dangerfield—a lady six years dead! She came gliding out from beneath the King's Oak—she was all in white, of course. She frightened his horse—it started and threw him. That is Sir Peter's story—he remembers no more. Wilson, the head groom, supplements the marvellous tale by saying he heard the most 'hoffullest scream' that ever was heard, and rushing to the spot, found Saracen quivering with terror and Sir Peter in a dead faint on the ground. The ghost had gone. That is the legend, as we heard it; the facts are, Sir Peter was certainly thrown off his horse, and now lies ill and feverish up-stairs. His nerves are in such a state that he nearly falls into spasms if left a moment alone.'

"Who is with him?" Captain O'Donnell asked. He had listened very gravely and thoughtfully to Lady Cecil's explanation.

"Miss Herncastle. She is an excellent nurse, it appears, and he is docile as an infant in her hands, though fractious beyond belief with the rest of us, I believe." Lady Cecil tried to speak very carelessly, "Sir Arthur Tregenna is there also."

The chasseur lifted his eyes and looked at her keenly for a moment. She did not meet that blue piercing glance; she had stooped and was gathering the hyacinths at her feet.

"Miss Herncastle," he repeated that. "And he is passive as a child in her hands, is he? Now that is odd, too. I fancied he disliked and feared Miss Herncastle, because of her un-

accountable or fancied resemblance to this very dead Katherine Dangerfield."

"So he said. I don't pretend to understand it, or half the other things I see, but so it is. She gave him a second terrible fright, too, last night."

"How?"

"She came down and took charge of him when he was first brought in, it appears. Ginevra was there, of course; but poor Ginevra—of what earthly use is *she* in a sick room? She went back to her chamber when convinced there was no danger, and Miss Herncastle went to work, Mrs. Butler says, as though she had been a hospital nurse all her life, and restored him to consciousness. The moment he saw who it was, he uttered the most dreadful shriek, and fell back in a second swoon."

"Ah!" Captain O'Donnell said, intensely interested.

"They could do nothing with him then, until the surgeon came. When next restored his first question was 'Where is she?' 'Who?' the surgeon asked. 'Katherine Dangerfield,' was the wild answer; 'I saw her twice to-night—once out under the trees, and five minutes ago by my bedside!' He was like a man mad, they say, at first, then Butler explained that he was mistaken, that he had seen no one but Miss Herncastle, and Miss Herncastle came forward and confirmed her words. She looked at him steadily with those great eyes of hers—(you should see Mrs. Butler glare when describing it) and he subsided immediately, like a terrified child. I took her place early in the morning—she looked fagged to death—and Ginevra came in for a few minutes at noon; but strange to say, he asked for Miss Herncastle, and seemed restless and feverish until she came. Now he is perfectly quiet. The tableau in the sick room is this—Sir Arthur reading gravely aloud the *Castleford Chronicle* at one side of the bed, Miss Herncastle gravely embroidering at the other, and Sir Peter, lying with wide-open eyes that never leave Miss Herncastle's face. They all looked so very well content, that I came away."

She laughed a little and gathered more hyacinths for her bouquet. Again the soldier glanced at her with those blue, brilliant eyes of his, but again the brown eyes were intently fixed on her flowers. Was Lady Cecil jealous?

"It is a pity, no doubt, to interrupt so happy and well-assorted a party," he said, "still I think I will be vandal enough to do it. I am very much interested in this matter, and am going to turn amateur detective and probe it to the bottom. A

veritable ghost in this nineteenth century is a novel and wonderful curiosity; let us make the most of it. It is something even to see a man who has seen a ghost. It has never been my good fortune, in all my varied experience, to meet one before. I shall go at once and 'interview' Sir Peter."

He bowed and departed, and Pansy and Pearl, who had run off, rejoined Lady Cecil.

"How nice he is, aunty," Pearl said, "with such white teeth, and good-natured-looking, and everything. He's nicer than Sir Arthur. I don't like Sir Arthur, Pansy don't like Sir Arthur nor Papa Peter, nor Major Frankland."

"He's lovely," said Pansy, "only he's too big. They're all too big except Papa Peter, . Aunt Cecil, when I grow up I should like to marry Captain O'Donnell—shouldn't you?"

Lady Cecil blushed a little, laughed a little, and kissed the speaker.

"Captain O'Donnell is flattered by your preference, *petite;* still, I think he might find it tedious waiting until you grow up. Who'll reach the Keeper's Tree yonder first? One—two—three—now."

The game of romps began, and Pansy forgot her matrimonial projects. And the object of her nine-year-old affections ran upstairs, and was shown into Sir Peter's room. The tableau was as Lady Cecil had described it, only Sir Arthur had ceased reading, and was gazing, as well as Sir Peter, at the calm face opposite, and the white rapid fingers and gleaming needle.

"I trust I am not an intruder, Sir Peter," the young Irishman said, coming forward, "but hearing of your accident—"

"Come in, O'Donnell—come in," the sharp querulous voice of the invalid said; "I wanted to see you. If you're tired sitting here, Sir Arthur, perhaps O'Donnell will take your place.'

"With pleasure, Sir Peter." The chasseur came forward, saluted the lady and the Cornish baronet, and took Sir Arthur's vacated seat.

"And with your permission, Sir Peter, now that Captain O'Donnell has come, I will go too. I have not been out today, and my head aches. I will administer your medicine, though, before I go."

He took it submissively from her hand. Captain O'Donnell watched every movement, and followed with his eyes the stately figure out of the room. She closed the door after her, and they were quite alone.

"This is a very strange—a very remarkable occurrence, Sir

Peter," he began. "The talk is, that you saw a ghost. Now I thought ghosts were exploded ideas? Will you pardon me if I think so still?"

"I wish to Heaven *I* could," Sir Peter groaned. The afternoon sunshine was pouring into the room; his nerves had recovered their tone, and he had a companion. He could talk sufficiently calmly now of the apparition. "Unfortunately for me, it admits of no doubt. As plainly as I see you sitting here beside me, I saw Katherine Dangerfield last night. I saw her face plainly—plainly in the light of the moon; the night was clear as day. Saw her as I have seen her a hundred times here in Scarswood."

"And she vanished when you looked at her?"

"I don't know when she vanished. My horse saw her as well as I; Wilson will tell you he found him trembling all over with terror when he came up. He threw me—I fell and fainted. I remember no more until I opened my eyes here in this room, and—" He stopped and cast a look of nervous dread at the door.

"And you thought you saw the ghost a second time. You mistook Miss Herncastle for your dead relative; she wasn't a relative, but you know what I mean. She is very like her, is she not?"

"Awfully, frightfully like her," the baronet answered, in a trembling tone. "O'Donnell, I tell you I'm afraid of that woman—I don't know why, but I am. Perhaps because of her resemblance to Katherine; perhaps—I tell you, I don't know why, but her eyes, her face, her voice, frighten me. They are so like—so like."

"And yet you persist in having her with you, in your room."

"Yes; and I can't tell you why there either. She frightens me, and she fascinates me. Why did she ever come here? *Who* is she? How dare she come to be so horribly like that dead girl?"

"How, indeed!" Captain O'Donnell answered. "Sir Peter, I have a great curiosity concerning this Katherine Dangerfield. Have you any picture of her? I would give a good deal to see one."

"Yes, I have," the sick man said. "Do you see that escritoire over there? Open that—the key is in it; open the third drawer to the left and you will find a photograph of Katherine Dangerfield, taken a month before she died. You will see the wonderful likeness at once."

Redmond O'Donnell obeyed. He unlocked the escritoire, opened the drawer, and produced a picture wrapped in silver paper. It was a photograph, soft and clear as an engraving, and beautifully tinted. The chasseur took it to the window and gazed upon it long and earnestly.

The story of Katherine Dangerfield had been told him in brief, by different people at different times, and its sad pathos had touched him deeply. Her only fault had been that she had loved "not wisely, but too well," had trusted too implicitly, and had believed the man she loved, and was ready to endow with her fortune, as generous and faithful as herself. And all had been torn from her in one bitter hour—all, and Death, the only friend who had been true, came to her aid. And now he held her picture, taken during the happiest period of her life, the month before her marriage. And, as Sir Peter had said, the first thing that had struck him was the strong resemblance to Miss Herncastle. No one could fail to look upon the two and not exclaim, "How like!" Only at first glance, though; the more you looked, the more this first striking similarity seemed to fade. It was like, but could never have been taken for the portrait of my lady's mysterious governess.

He sat down and deliberately analyzed the features one by one—the points of resemblance. He began at the beginning. First the hair, this pictured hair, was brown—pale chestnut brown, without a tinge of red or yellow: that is if the tinting had been true to nature. It rippled over neck and shoulders and down to the slim girl's waist, a bright, feathery cloud. Miss Herncastle's hair was jet-black, straight as an Indian's, and twisted in great shining coils about her head. The brow in the picture was broad, open, intelligent. Miss Herncastle's hair was worn *crêpé* down to her straight black brows. The pictured eyes laughed up at you from the card; the eyes of the governess were grave, somber, smileless. The nose was the same—the same precisely—neither straight nor yet *retroussé*, not classic, and not snub. The mouth was handsome—the handsomest feature of all—square-cut at the corners, sweet, strong, like the eyes, smiling, and with bright, resolute lips. The shape of Miss Herncastle's was the same, the expression entirely different. All the hard lines, the rigid compression, the grave resolution of the living mouth were wanting in the pictured one. The chin was alike—a curved chin—a square, determined mouth, the throat was graceful and girlish, the shoulders sloping—the waist long and slender; Miss Hern

castle's proportions were those of what men call "a fine woman."

The moments passed; in the sick room all was very still The buzzing of the big blue flies on the pane, the restless tossing of the invalid, the chirp and rustle of summer life without, all were plainly audible. Had Captain O'Donnell fallen asleep over the picture? Peter broke out at last impatiently:

"Well, O'Donnell, are you dreaming there? What do you think of the picture? Did you ever see such a likeness? It might be Miss Herncastle's portrait, might it not?"

O'Donnell rose up and returned to his place by the bedside, picture in hand.

"No," he said, with slow, thoughtful gravity, "never Miss Herncastle's picture; there is not one expression of this face like any she ever wears. Shall I tell you, Sir Peter, what it is like?"

"Of course; for what other reason have I shown it to you?"

"Then here's my opinion: If Katherine Dangerfield, instead of dying and being buried yonder in Castleford cemetery, had lived, and vowed vengeance for her wrongs, and came back here to wreak that vengeance, this pictured face would look now as Miss Herncastle's does."

Sir Peter half raised himself, alarmed, excited.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"This. This photographed face is full of latent power, undeveloped, unsuspected—to be used, as circumstances turn, for good or evil. If Katherine Dangerfield had lived, and her life had been a happy one, she would have been one of the best, the bravest, the most womanly of women—a model wife, an excellent mother, a noble matron. If she had lived, wronged and embittered as her life was, I believe, Sir Peter, there is no evil, no depth scarcely, to which she would not be capable of sinking to gratify her revenge. It is the face of one who might have been a dangerous woman. This face looks a little, a very little, like Miss Herncastle. If she had not died, I should feel certain Miss Herncastle and Katherine Dangerfield were one and the same."

There was a blank pause. Sir Peter lay back among his pillows, terrified, helpless. The chasseur's face was full of dark, grave thought.

"Good Heavens, O'Donnell!" Sir Peter gasped at length. "What *do* you mean?"

"I hardly know—yet. I feel like a man groping in the

dark. Sir Peter, there can be no doubt—(it is absurd of me to suppose such a thing)—there can be no doubt Katherine Dangerfield did die?"

"No doubt?" cried Sir Peter, shocked beyond all expression. "Of *course* there was no doubt. Good Heavens above! O'Donnell, I—I never heard of such a thing. Dead! Why, certainly she's dead—dead and buried six years ago. *You* can see her grave any day, for that matter, in Castleford cemetery."

"Ah! no doubt. Did I not say it was a most absurd supposition on my part? Of course she's dead, as you say. You saw her dead, no doubt?"

"Saw her dead!" the baronet repeated, with a shudder; "I only wish I had not. I saw her dead—cold, and white, and still—I see her so every day of my life; and Talbot saw her—ask Talbot—he was one of the men who saw her laid in her coffin and in her grave. Dead! Yes, she's dead—dead—dead. Poor little Kathie!"

His voice choked; he turned away and covered his face with his hands. His nerves were all unstrung; he was weak and ailing, frightened and lonely, his very life was fast becoming a torture to him, and he broke down. O'Donnel looked at him in surprise.

"You were fond of your cousin, then—I mean of this unhappy young lady? Why I thought—"

"You thought right," the little baronet cried, passionately, "I was *not* fond of her. I was a brute, a villain, a cowardly wretch. I insulted her—brutally, I tell you, and she—" His eyes dilated, his face grew ashen white. "I see her still, O'Donnell," he whispered, huskily, "as she stood before me then—like death, like snow, frozen and white, swearing that oath of vengeance: '*Living, I will pursue you to the ends of the earth. Dead, I will come from the grave and haunt you.*' She swore it, and she was one, living or dead, to keep her word. What I saw last night has not been the living; and she will come to me from her shroud and coffin again and again, until I go raving mad at last."

His voice rose almost to a shriek of passion and fear. The last remnant of man's courage died out of the miserable little wretch's body, and he burst out into a tempest of womanish sobs and tears.

O'Donnell sat silent watching him—pity, contempt, disgust, all in his grave, silent face. He made no attempt to console or soothe this stricken sinner; most of all that was soft and

tender in his nature had died a natural death years ago. He sat grimly enough now, waiting for a lull in the storm. It came. Even Sir Peter Dangerfield had manliness enough left to be ashamed of crying like a whipped schoolboy.

"I—I can't help it, O'Donnell," he said, piteously. "If you only knew what I have gone through since that time, what I have suffered, what I still suffer, you would feel for me. Katherine Dangerfield is dead, and I saw her spirit last night, as I'll see it again and again, until I too go mad or die."

"We have an old adage in our country," O'Donnell said, curtly, "'that sorrow is soon enough when it comes.' Now, for my part, I don't believe in ghostly visitations of any kind, in common with most people; but that is a point we won't argue. You believe you saw a ghost last night. Now, Sir Peter, is it not barely possible that Miss Herncastle may be a somnambulist, and that all unconsciously she got out of bed *en sac de nuit*, and that it was she you saw under the King's Oak?"

But Sir Peter shook his head.

"No," he said. "Some one asked that very question—the earl I think it was—and Miss Herncastle replied that she had never walked in her sleep in her life—that she had gone to her room at half-past ten. And it wasn't Miss Herncastle—it was no resemblance this time—it was Katherine Dangerfield."

Captain O'Donnell shrugged his shoulders. Argument was wasted here. He drew out his watch. It was past six now, and nearing the Scarswood dinner hour.

"I won't stay to dine to-day, I think," he said rising. "Sir Peter, with your permission I'll keep this picture for the present: I don't see my way very clearly through this maze, and I *can't* believe your solution of the enigma. Katherine Dangerfield may not have been noted for an overstock of sound sense in her lifetime, but I can't believe that her ghost would remain so supremely silly after six years' interment as to take nocturnal rambles to Scarswood on purpose to keep a most sensational vow. I simply can't believe it. Shall I ring for some one to take my place?"

He rang. Mrs. Butler and one of the maids came, and the chasseur took his departure. The family were in their rooms dressing; he made his way out unnoticed; the lawn and terraces were deserted also, and he passed out of the house and the gates undisturbed.

He walked on to the town, lost in thought. What did this

mystery mean? He might have thought the ghost a myth, a figment of Sir Peter's superstitious, overheated brain, but there was the evidence of the horse. The groom had found him quivering with terror—he had thrown his master in his frightened bound—and Saracen was a calm, well-tempered animal on ordinary occasions. Saracen was not superstitious, nor likely to be terrified by optical illusions. The horse had seen *something*—now what had that someting been—goblin or human?

It was a riddle the Chasseur d'Afrique could not read. He walked on with knitted brow and perplexed mind into and beyond the town. It was very quiet; the respectable fourth-class, shop-keeping, rate-paying citizens were in their back parlors drinking tea. An opal gray sky was overhead, a faint evening breeze was stirring, and the golden evening stars twinkled amid the golden gray. In its peace and hush Captain O'Donnell went on, out into the suburbs, opened the quaint old gate, and entered the solitary churchyard. The deepest hush of all reigned here; not a sound but the twitter of the birds in their nests and the rustling of the leaves could be heard. He passed on, looking at the inscriptions on the tombstones, until at last he reached that solitary corner, where, under the waving fir-trees, six years ago, they had laid Sir John Dangerfield's adopted daughter.

He paused. The gray-stone was overrun with clematis, the grave with grass and weeds. He pushed aside the fragrant blossoms and read the inscription:

KATHERINE,
ÆTAT 17.
RESURGAM.

"Resurgam—I shall rise again!" In the light of these latter events, how ominous the word sounded—like a threat from the dead. He stood there until the last yellow glimmer died out of the western sky, and the whole expanse had turned cold and gray. The rising night wind struck chill, when at last he aroused himself and turned away.

But before he had gone five yards he paused. Then after that momentary pause, he passed into the shadow of a tree-shaded walk, and stood still.

A man and a woman were standing just inside the gate, screened from passers-by outside, by the elms that waved above it. Even at that distance he recognized the woman's figure—it was not to be mistaken—it was Miss Herncastle.

Fate seemed to take a malicious pleasure in throwing him across her path, in foredooming him to play the spy.

He stood still; it was impossible to go a step onward without being seen, and what would the governess think, but that he had dogged her steps again? He stood still. The backs of both were turned upon him, but he knew Miss Herncastle's stately figure and bearing, and dark, plain dress immediately. The man—who was the man? For one moment O'Donnell's heart gave a bound—a sickening bound of fear. Was it—was it Sir Arthur Tregenna? The height was the same; this man wore a gray suit and a conical felt hat; so did the Cornish baronet upon occasions. Could it be the chivalrous, the high-minded Cornishman could stoop to such deception, such double-dealings, such treachery to himself and Lady Cecil as to keep private assignations with the governess?

As the thought crossed his mind the two turned, moved forward to the gate, and he saw with a sense of unutterable relief that he was mistaken. It was not Sir Arthur, it was in no way like him. He saw the face of an utter stranger. The daylight still lingered, and the moon shone radiantly bright; he saw their faces clearly. Miss Herncastle, calm, statuesque, as usual; the man tall, fair, student-like, with stooping shoulders and a pale, thin face. They were speaking as they approached the gate and him. In the profound stillness the last words of Miss Herncastle in her rich, sweet, full tones, came to him:

"You must go back, Henry, and at once, to-night. That you have been at Castleford at all will cause talk enough. I had to tell you Marie De Lansac was here, but I certainly did not expect you to answer my letter in person. Say good-by now, and let me go on alone; it would be fatal to all my projects to be seen with you."

Their hands clasped. The man murmured something earnestly, in too low a tone to be heard. Miss Herncastle's clear voice responded:

"Give up! give up now, after all I have suffered, all I have worked so hard to accomplish, all I have done already! Never! You should know me better than that. The first installment of my revenge I have had. What I have sworn, I will do; then, I care little what comes. Good-night, my kind, my faithful friend; go back to London at once."

She pulled a thick lace vail she wore over her face, and walked away, with her own rapid, resolute step. The man lingered for

nearly ten minutes; then he, too, opened the gate and disappeared in the gloaming.

And Captain O'Donnell! He stood like one petrified. *Marie De Lansac!* his sister's Louisianian name, on Miss Herncastle's lips—and to this man! What did it mean? And her revenge—the oath she had made, and meant to keep! What strange, incomprehensible jumble of mysteries was it altogether? His head absolutely turned giddy for a moment with the surging thoughts that filled his brain.

WHO was Miss Herncastle? He glanced at the grave, and the gray stone, gleaming in the moonrays, that told the legend of Katherine Dangerfield's death. If Katherine Dangerfield were dead—*if*—what reason had he to doubt it? And yet!—and yet!—his blue eyes flashed, his lips set, his face grew like iron with sudden, stern resolve.

"I'll get at the bottom of this juggling. I'll find out who *you* are, my mysterious Miss Herncastle! I'll find out whether it was Katherine Dangerfield's ghost Sir Peter saw under the King's Oak, or—a living woman! And, above all, I'll find out what the name of Marie De Lansac has to do with you or that man!"

---

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE STORY OF THE IVORY MINIATURE.

"LADY CECIL," Lord Ruysland said, "a word with you!"

It was an ominous beginning. The earl never called his daughter by her proper name of title unless in a state of unusual gravity or unusual displeasure. They were alone together. The hour was just after dinner, and the ladies, among whom the governess had figured, had adjourned from the dining to the drawing room. Miss O'Donnell had gone to the piano, my lady perused a popular novel. Miss Herncastle seated herself by the window with that filmy lace embroidery—Lady Dangerfield kept her constantly employed—and Lady Cecil, feeling oppressed and out of spirits somehow, had thrown a black lace mantilla over her head and white summer dress, and stepped through one of the open windows

out upon the lawn, and down to the terrace. She was pacing slowly and thoughtfully up and down, a lovely vision in the sunset, when her father's voice abruptly spoke behind her.

She turned in surprise. She had imagined him with the other gentlemen, Sir Arthur, the major, and Sir Peter, over the wine and after-dinner talk, and here he was beside her, with a face of ominous gravity.

"With me, papa? Certainly. What is it?"

But her heart fluttered, guiltily a little, as she asked the question, what it was—something very unpleasant, flashed upon her at once.

"What is it?" Do you really need to ask that question, Lady Cecil? I have come to demand an explanation of your extraordinary conduct of late."

"My extraordinary conduct! Really, papa—"

"That will do! You feign surprise very well, my dear; but it doesn't deceive me. I repeat—your extraordinary conduct! What do you intend by it? In regard to Miss Herncastle, I mean, of course.'

"Miss Herncastle!"

"Lady Cecil, be good enough to cease repeating everything I say as if you were a parrot," her father said, more irritation in his face and tone than she had ever seen or heard there before in her life. "Your hearing is not defective, I hope—I said Miss Herncastle. What do you mean by your conduct to that young woman? Why do you insist upon forcing her society upon us—by making her one of the family, as it were—by having her to dine with us? Oh, don't lay the blame upon Ginevra—*she* would never think of so preposterous a thing if left to herself. I repeat once more, Lady Cecil—what does it mean?"

"Really, papa,"—and Lady Cecil tried to laugh—"I did not know so simple a matter would so seriously exercise *you*. I thought you believed in equality, fraternity—were a radical of the most rabid sort in politics, and—"

"Keep to the point, if you please," the earl interrupted, impatiently; "we're not talking politics now. It does not matter what I believe, whether I am radical or conservative in this affair, that I can see. It is a purely personal and family concern. Cecil!"—sternly—"has Sir Arthur Tregenna formally proposed to you yet?"

The faint carnation rose up all over Lady Cecil's fair, pearly face.

"No, papa."

"I thought not," but his face darkened as he said it. "And whose fault is *that?* Not Sir Arthur's, I am very certain."

"Sir Arthur's, surely, papa. What would you have? The absurd customs of England require that a lady shall wait until she is asked. Do you wish me to go to Sir Arthur and order him to marry me?"

"I wish you to act like a rational being, to cease acting in such a manner as to render a proposal forever impossible. Are you willfully blind, that you cannot see he is falling in love with that confounded nursery governess?"

"My sight is perfect," Lady Cecil answered, coldly; "and if it were not I still might see that. Sir Arthur takes little pains to conceal his preference. As it is probably the first time that austere gentleman ever felt a touch of the tender passion, it would be thousand pities to come between him and it. *I* certainly shall not."

"What do you mean?"

"This, papa," Lady Cecil said, "there is no use in getting angry or excited—that if Sir Arthur prefers Miss Herncastle to me I shall never be Miss Herncastle's rival. And if he *can* honestly and truly fall in love with her, as I believe it is in his nature to love, I honor and congratulate him on his choice. Why should you or I try to thwart it? He is not bound to me in any way; he cares as little for me, in the way of love, as I do for him. Miss Herncastle is a much cleverer woman than I am, or ever shall be, and if he wishes it, why, let him marry her. She certainly suits him much better than I should, and for the difference in rank, if *he* can overlook that, we surely may. Of this be very certain,"—her eyes flashed and her color rose—"I will accept no man's hand while his heart is another woman's, though his fortune were three times thirty thousand a year."

The earl listened, amaze, scorn, anger, passion, swaying alternately over his placid face; but he heard her to the end. His eyes were fixed upon her proud, resolute face, the sneer that rarely left them curling his lips cynically now.

"Fine sentiments," he said; "fine heroics, taken second-hand, no doubt, from the Castleford circulating library. You appear to have changed your mind of late, my dear; we did not hear these lofty sentiments when we spoke together some weeks ago of this matter in London. But things have changed since then,

and other actors have appeared upon the scene. I wonder now"—he folded his arms and looked at her with sneering sarcasm—"whether the coming of that very fine young Irishman, Redmond O'Donnell, has had anything to do with it?"

Long practice had taught him to stab home—surely and strongly. The flush of color that had arisen to her face died out as he spoke, leaving her whiter than her dress.

"This is your revenge," she said slowly; "but I think my father might have spared me that. From other lips I should deem it an insult."

"Indeed. And why, I wonder? He's very handsome, he has the dash and the air *noble* you women love, and he is the 'hero of a thousand battles.' You all like strong warriors, don't you? And then—it may have been fancy—but I used to think, long ago in Ireland, that you were in some danger of—you understand, I suppose? Did you ever wonder, my dear, why I carried you off so suddenly? That was why. You were only sixteen, and sixteen is so supremely silly. And though I don't think your youthful *penchant* was returned at that time, Irish hearts are proverbially inflammable, and it might have been. Being poor as a church mouse yourself, it would hardly have done to ally you to another church mouse as long as bread and cheese are requisites of existence. I carried you off, and you pined on the stem for a few weeks, then Cecil was herself again. Now the hero of Torryglen is with us once more; and I remember the French have a proverb about one always returning to his first love. Your conduct of late has certainly been so extraordinary that there must be some reason for it."

He stopped.

She never spoke. She was white to the lips with some painful inward emotion; her brown eyes looked straight before her, with a light no one had ever seen before in the soft eyes of *La Reine Blanche*.

"You do not answer," her father said, beginning to feel that he might have gone too far; "perhaps then I am wrong after all in my suppositions. If so, I beg your pardon. But this matter lies so near my heart, my dear, that you will forgive me if in my displeasure and disappointment I speak harshly."

His heart! The Right Honorable the Earl of Ruysland's heart! A smile crossed his daughter's lips—a faint, bitter smile, not pleasant to see on lips so young and sweet.

"I repeat it," her father said, as though answering that scorn

ful smile; "my heart is set upon your marriage with the son of my oldest friend. It will be the bitterest blow of my life if that marriage is not consummated."

"Papa," Lady Cecil answered, "let us drop our masks—there is no one to see or hear. Your heart is fixed on my marriage with the son of your oldest friend. How would it be if the son of that oldest friend were penniless as—as Redmond O'Donnell, for instance, whom you fear so greatly? It is the thirty thousand a year you wish me to marry, is it not? It is a rich and liberal son-in-law your heart is set on, I fancy. You call it by a prettier name, but that is what it really comes to."

"Very well, my dear—on the thirty thousand, if you will. I am penniless, you are penniless. Is the degradation of marrying a fortune greater than the degradation of living on the bounty of a man like Peter Dangerfield? You are an earl's daughter, a reigning belle, high-born and high-bred, and you are a pauper. The food you eat, the roof that shelters you, the dress you wear, are unpaid for. This sort of thing can't go on forever. A crisis is very near—flight, exile for me; for you, my proud, high-spirited Cecil, *what?*"

She leaned against a slender rose-wreathed pilaster, and covered her face with both hands, her heart too full for words.

"Truth is unpleasant," her father pursued, "but there are times when it must be spoken. This is one of them. You are acting like a fool—I really can't help saying it—and must be brought to your senses. Let us look the facts in the face. You came down here with every intention of accepting Sir Arthur—Sir Arthur comes down with every intention of proposing. On the day following the picnic I know he meant to propose; I saw it on his face—any one might see it. Everything had gone on velvet; you had played your cards very well," she winced at the words—"our object was attained. When Ginevra sent him into the violet boudoir in search of you, I could have sworn he would have proposed before he came out. Five minutes after I saw that confounded Miss Herncastle, sent by the Demon of Mischief, no doubt, follow and spoil all. He met her, you presented her as though she had been his equal, and the trouble began. Without beauty, without vivacity, without station, she is yet one of these women whose subtle power is as irresistible to some men as it is incomprehensible. What you, with all your beauty, all your attractions, all your prior claim, have failed to do, *she* has done. He is an honorable man, and with the innate simplicity of a child

I believe in my soul he has not the faintest idea that he is falling infatuatedly in love with her. She fascinates him, and he is led unconsciously into the trap. She is one of your silent deep, dangerous sort. She will marry him—mark my words, Queenie—that young woman will marry him."

She looked up, pale and tremulous, in the silvery dusk.

"Well, papa, and if she does? She will not be the first governess who has married a baronet."

"My dear, there is *this* of it. That woman is no ordinary governess; she is an adventuress, and one of the deepest and most unprincipled sort."

"Papa! this is cruel, this is unjust. You know nothing of Miss Herncastle."

"I have eyes and I have studied physiognomy before now. That woman is capable of deeds you never think of; she is clever, deep-thinking, and unscrupulous. She will marry Sir Arthur before he knows it, and the day that makes her his wife is the day that ushers in his life-long misery. I can't stand by and see it. You must save him, Cecil."

"Papa, it is impossible. Oh, pray let me alone. What can I do? I liked him, I esteemed him, I might grow to love him in time, as a wife should do so deserving a husband. While *his* heart was free, I was willing to obey you, to retrieve our fallen fortunes, and marry him. But all that is changed. We have fallen very low, but there is still a deeper depth than mere poverty. If he cares for her, if he wishes to marry her, if he loves her, in short, it would be degrading on my part to accept his hand. I do not want to be poor, I do not want to anger or disobey you, papa, but I cannot—I cannot—I cannot!"

Her voice broke in a sort of sob, her brown eyes were full of passionate pleading and pain. Her fingers tore all unseeing the flowers from the pillar and flung them wantonly away.

"It is not too late yet," the earl said, calmly; "the mischief has begun—it is not done. Trust to me; I will repair it—I will save him."

She looked at him suspiciously.

"How?"

"I shall have Miss Herncastle sent away. I shall explain to Ginevra, and at any cost the governess shall be dismissed And pending that dismissal she shall not be allowed to appear in our midst. 'Lead us not into temptation.' Not a word, Cecil: in this matter I shall act as I please. You must marry Sir Arthur Tregenna—you *shall*—not fate itself can part you

This is the last evening of Miss Herncastle's appearance in the drawing-room—the last week (if I can manage it so speedily) of her stay at Scarswood. And for you, don't hold poor Tregenna at arm's length as you do. You avoid him on every possible occasion; you slip away and leave him whenever you can. Don't let me fancy my suspicions about O'Donnell are correct."

Lady Cecil started up, stung beyond all endurance by the last words.

"Again Redmond O'Donnell! Papa, this is not to be endured even from you. You insult me, you slander him. It was you who brought him here. Why did you do it? He would never have come of his own free will—you insisted upon it. And since he has been here, has he given you any ground for your suspicions? Has he paid me the slightest attention beyond the most formal courtesy of a gentleman to a lady? Have you ever seen us together?—has he been half a quarter as attentive as Major Frankland, or the rector's son? Leave Captain O'Donnell's name out of the discussion. Believe me, if all your fears were as groundless as your fears of him, your mind would be easily set at rest. He treats me with a civil indifference that is as unflattering as it is sincere."

She turned abruptly to leave him, a bitterness in her voice she hardly strove to conceal, a passion in her eyes rarely seen there.

"Have you anything more to say?" she asked abruptly; "it is turning chilly, and I am cold." She shivered as she spoke, and her fair face looked quite colorless in the fading light. "Do as you will. It is useless to resist fate. If I must marry Sir Arthur—I must. But if Miss Herncastle be an adventuress, I wonder what I am?"

She pushed aside the rich curtains of silk and lace, and stepped into the drawing-room. The lamps filled the long apartment with golden mellow light, and Sir Arthur sat at the governess' side. Squire Talbot had called, and he was entertaining Miss O'Donnell. Her brother was not present; for that, at least, Lady Cecil was grateful.

Lady Cecil took the vacant place at the piano. Her father following her in, crossed without compunction to the pair in the window recess, the lady embroidering still, the gentleman watching the clear-cut profile as it bent over the work, the long, white, swift fingers, and neither talking much.

"How hard you work, Miss Herncastle!" his lordship

blandly; you put us idle people to shame. Is Sir Arthur taking lessons in needle-work? I hope you find him an apt pupil, my dear young lady?"

Sir Arthur colored, partly with annoyance, partly with a sense of compunction. Latterly it had begun to dawn upon him that his mission to Scarswood had not been fulfilled—that he had *not* asked Lady Cecil Clive to be his wife. And in part he stood committed to her. She must know what had brought him down; she must know what had been on his lips when Miss Herncastle entered the boudoir. And Miss Herncastle! in some way he stood committed here, too. She attracted him as no woman had ever done before in his life, and he had made no secret of that attraction. To keep faith with one, he must in a way break it to the other. Like that gallant knight of the Laureate's story, "his honor rooted in dishonor stood." And this evening he was realizing it for the first time.

Miss Herncastle smiled, perfectly unembarrassed, and reached over for the dainty little basket that held her flosses and laces. Either by accident or design, the earl never knew which, the little basket upset, and flosses and laces fell in a shining heap at the earl's feet. Something else fell, too—a square, hard substance that flashed in the gaslight. Sir Arthur picked up the basket and fancy work, his lordship the square substance. What was it? A portrait—an old-fashioned ivory miniature, beautifully painted and set in a jeweled frame. His eyes fell upon it, and a sudden stillness of great surprise came over him from head to foot; then he turned round and looked Miss Herncastle full in the face.

She met his gaze with calm composure, and reached out her hand.

"My favorite souvenir," she said. "I hope it is not injured. "How stupid of me to upset the basket. Thanks, my lord."

But my lord still held the ivory miniature, still looked at Miss Herncastle.

"I beg your pardon," he said, in an altered voice; "it sounds rather impertinent, but I must ask where you got this."

Miss Herncastle looked surprised.

"That! that picture, my lord? Oh! 'thereby hangs a tale.' Do you know who it is?"

"Miss Herncastle, do you?"

"No; and I have the greatest curiosity on the subject. That picture came into my possession in the most accidental manner,

and for the past six years I have been trying to discover its owner, but as yet I have not succeeded. Her name was Mrs. Vavasor."

"Mrs. Vavasor! I knew more than one Mrs. Vavasor, but none of them in the least likely to possess this picture."

"You know the original of that picture, then, my lord?"

"Undoubtedly, Miss Herncastle. The original of this picture is Major Lionel Cardonnell, my late wife's only brother, at present in Quebec. May I, in turn, inquire who was Mrs. Vavasor, and how she came to be possessed of this?"

He was watching her—vague, strange suspicions afloat in his mind. From first to last she was a strange, mysterious creature, this governess: an air of mystery appeared to enshroud her; her possession of his brother-in-law's picture seemed to cap the climax.

Miss Herncastle met his suspicious gaze with the calm of conscious rectitude.

"Two questions, my lord, which, unfortunately, I am incapable of answering. Six years ago I gave music lessons in the family of a mercantile gentleman—his name was Jones, and he has since emigrated to Australia with his family; and visiting that family I met Mrs. Vavasor. We became very friendly, not to the point of intimacy, though, and one day, upon my leaving the house, she gave me this portrait, and asked me to take it to a jeweler's to have one of the stones replaced in the case. She was suffering from headache herself she said, and dare not venture out, and servants were too careless to be trusted. She told me, laughingly, that it was the portrait of an old lover of hers. I took it, and for four days again did not visit the family. When I returned I discovered Mrs. Vavasor had suddenly gone way; they had discovered something concerning her not to her credit—had quarreled and parted. She had gone to France, they said, and refused to have anything to do with her property. Under these circumstances I kept the picture until she should send for it. She never did send for it, and I have never met her since. I never heard the name of the gentleman whose likeness it is until to-day."

She threaded her needle, and placidly went on with her work. The earl listened in profound silence. It sounded plausible enough, and yet he did not believe her. But then, he was prejudiced against Miss Herncastle. He handed it back to her and arose.

"What was your Mrs. Vavasor like, Miss Herncastle?"

"She was a little, dark woman of French extraction, I believe, in spite of her English name, with black eyes and hair, and an incessant smile. As a rule, people called her very pretty. Her first name was Harriet."

"Harriet? Yes—I see—I see. It was Harriet Lelacheur, to a dead certainty—Mrs. Harman, rather, under an alias. I thought so from the first. I thought her dead years ago."

He sauntered away. Sir Arthur in turn took the ivory miniature and gazed at it.

"Did *you* know Major Cardonnell, Sir Arthur? But I suppose you must have been too young."

"No, I never saw Lionel Cardonnell," the baronet said; "I heard the story often, though. Very handsome face, is it not?—much handsomer than that of the late Countess of Ruysland, and yet like her, too."

"You knew the countess?"

"Certainly not. The Countess of Ruysland died before her daughter was a week old, but I have often seen her picture. Lady Cecil wears one, and there is a large painting at Clive Court."

"Does Lady Cecil resemble her mother? If so, her mother must certainly have been very beautiful."

"She does not in the least resemble her mother—her father, either, as you may see—nor any relative of the Clive or Cardonnell families. Miss Herncastle, will you think it strange if I tell you—*you* resemble at times, in the most singular manner, Lady Ruysland?"

"Impossible, Sir Arthur!"

"It is perfectly true. His lordship saw the resemblance the first evening he met you—Lady Cecil has spoken often of the singular familiarity of your face. I did not remark it to her, but I know it is your resemblance to her mother. Something in the expression, something in the poise of the head and the color of the eyes, are precisely the same as in her ladyship's portraits. You are much more like the late Lady Ruysland than her own daughter."

Her self-command was wonderful, but the filmy-web of flossy lace dropped suddenly in her lap, and her face turned from him to the purple twilight, where the odorous roses slept, and the tall arum lilies hung their snowy heads. It was a minute before she could trust herself to speak. Then her soft, musical laugh chimed on the stillness, her smiling face turned to him once more.

"Another unaccountable resemblance," she said. "Really, Sir Arthur, I begin to think I must be a most abnormal sort of a person. I startle poor, nervous Sir Peter by my real or fancied resemblance to a young lady relative of his dead and gone, I startle the earl by my resemblance to his late wife; I wonder now whose double I shall find myself next?"

"It *is* odd," Sir Arthur answered, looking at her gravely. "Your resemblance to the late Miss Katherine Dangerfield must be very striking indeed. Mr. Talbot, of Morecambe, is almost as much impressed by it as Sir Peter. Your likeness to Lady Ruysland's portrait is only seen at times, and then not very strongly. Still it is there."

"And this handsome young officer is Lady Ruysland's brother. I have puzzled myself a thousand times trying to imagine who it could be, so it is satisfactory to know even *that* much. But will you think me impertinently curious, Sir Arthur, if I should ask to know even more? There are reasons, not easily to be explained, connected with Mrs. Vavasor, that make me extremely desirous to know all I can of her antecedents. Was this gentleman—so greatly above her in rank as he must have been—really her lover?"

"Mrs. Vavasor? But you forget, Miss Herncastle, I do not know your Mrs. Vavasor. Lionel Cardonnell has not set foot in England for over five-and-twenty years. He has been stationed at every military depot in the Canadas, the Provinces, and Bermuda. At present he is in Quebec. Your Mrs. Vavasor may have known him out there."

"No," Miss Herncastle replied, "I fancy not. She knew him in England, and very long ago. Her maiden name was Harriet Lelacheur."

"Oh," cried Sir Arthur, a new light of intelligence breaking over him. "Harriet Lelacheur. Then it is quite clear, of course. And you knew Mrs. Harman, did you, Miss Herncastle?"

"I have met her. She called herself Mrs. Vavasor, though an alias, possibly."

"Or possibly she married again after Harman's death. Well, Miss Herncastle, she told you the truth concerning Cardonnell —he *was* her lover."

"And would have been her husband if he could—is that true also, Sir Arthur?"

"Perfectly true, I believe."

"Lady Ruysland—his sister—carried her off to some lonely

place on the Cornish coast, and imprisoned her there, while he exchanged into a regiment ordered to Canada," pursued Miss Herncastle.

"Again, quite true. I see she has been making you her confidante. He is married there—to a French Canadian, I believe, of great wealth, and great beauty, and no doubt laughs when he recalls his first grande passion for his sister's *femme de chambre*, and congratulates himself upon his narrow escape. Still, if one may venture to express an opinion on so delicate a matter, it can hardly be called a very creditable act on the part of the late countess."

"What!" the governess cried, "to save her brother from a designing adventuress—to save him from blighting all his prospects—ruining his life by a marriage with such a woman as *that?*"

He looked at her in surprise, and a little, perhaps, in displeasure.

"A designing adventuress? But she was *not* a designing adventuress in those days. She was very young and very impulsive, and very much in love. So was he. The end may have justified the means, but I doubt it. She was beneath him in rank, certainly, but they loved each other very sincerely. May a man not stoop sometimes to raise the woman of his choice to his own social level, and yet both be perfectly happy?"

This was treading on delicate ground. His eyes brightened as he spoke; he looked at her eagerly. Miss Herncastle picked up her work, took another needleful of floss, and went calmly on.

"Certainly, if the woman of his choice be a lady. But that Harriet Lelacheur could never have been. From my experience of her she must always have been underbred, selfish, coarse, and wicked. These qualities may not have shown in the happy days of her youth—a lover's blind eyes may not have seen them; believe me, though, they were always there. It was a fortunate escape for Major Cardonnell; he has reason to congratulate himself, and thank his sister's clever strategy. By the way, though, Lady Ruysland and her ex-waiting-maid must have become reconciled afterward, from what I heard the latter say."

She was working industriously once more. The Cornish baronet was watching her.

"They did. My lady, by way of recompense, I suppose, dowered her waiting-maid, and married her to a tradesman of the place; his name was Harman. He died before the first

year of his married life had expired, leaving his young wife and a babe of a fortnight old. Of course, of all this I know nothing personally; I have heard my poor father, though, and Lord Ruysland speak of it so often that it seems familiar to me as a household word."

"And Lady Ruysland came to the aid of her servant again, I suppose, in her hour of widowhood and adversity. She was noble in that, at least."

"She was noble in all things," Sir Arthur answered; "it was a loyal and generous nature, but with a passionate pride, a fiery temper, a latent jealousy and recklessness that have wrecked many a noble nature before. It is not a pleasant story, Miss Herncastle, but at least it is no secret. She flew to her humble friend, not *to* succor, but *for* shelter."

"For shelter," Miss Herncastle repeated, looking at him steadily; "and died in her arms."

"Ah! you know the story. Yes, in that humble cottage, with only her old servant by her side, poor, passionate, erring Lady Ruysland died. She was insanely jealous—who is to tell whether with or without cause?—of one who had been her rival years before, younger, fairer than herself, as highly born, but poor. His lordship was absent, in Italy—rumor said, to be near *her*. Very likely rumor erred, as it usually does; at least her ladyship believed it, and on the night of the earl's return a violent scene ensued. He left her in high anger; bitter words had passed; and in the frenzy of her rage and jealousy, she fled. Next morning she was nowhere to be found. All day they looked for her in vain. At nightfall a messenger came to Clive Court from Mrs. Harman, summoning his lordship. A daughter had been born, a wife was dead."

Once more the embroidery dropped in Miss Herncastle's lap. Her eyes were dilated, fixed on his face; her lips were breathless and apart in the intensity of her interest.

"They brought the poor dead lady home, the child they left with Mrs. Harman to nurse. Whether or no Lord Ruysland really had or had not wronged his wife, no one will ever know now. Her death was a terrible blow to him—for a time." The speaker paused a second, glanced across at his lordship's serenely high-bred, placid countenance, and smiled. "For a time. We lose our nearest and dearest, and the world goes round much the same as ever, and we with it, and we eat, drink, and are merry, and—forget. Clive Court was shut up,

Mrs. Harman was handsomely pensioned, and the baby, Lady Cecil, left with her.

For two years Lord Ruysland was absent; then a letter from Mrs. Harman recalled him. She was of French extraction, and had taken a sudden fancy to visit her relations in Paris—would his lordship come and take his little daughter and let her go. He returned to England, received Lady Cecil from her hands, placed her with some relatives in a remote part of England to grow up, and returned to his wandering life. Mrs. Harman left England with *her* daughter, and I fancy the earl never heard of her from that day to this, until he chanced to see his brother-in-law's picture a few moments ago. Miss Herncastle, Lady Cecil has left the piano; after all this talking will you not reward me by a little of your matchless music?"

She arose at once and went with him to the piano. For nearly an hour she sat playing bravely and brilliantly, he seated near, his face in shadow, his ears drinking in those sweetest strains. Then she got up, and for the first time in his experience of her, held out her hand as she said good-night.

"You have done me a great favor to-night, Sir Arthur," she said; "greater than you know. Let me thank you, and—good-night."

He looked up at her in surprise. "A great favor," he repeated, holding her firm, cold hand in his clasp; "I don't understand, Miss Herncastle."

She smiled—a strange exultant sort of smile—looking not at him, but across the room, at the figures of the Earl of Ruysland, the Lady Cecil Clive. Long after he had reason to know what the strange and triumphant smile meant.

"You may understand some day, Sir Arthur, and sooner than you think. Once more, good-night."

With the words she was gone. He watched the tall, commanding figure as it swept across the room and disappeared. Other eyes had witnessed that farewell; the Earl of Ruysland set his lips, the delicate waxen cheek of Lady Cecil flushed.

"There shall be an end of this," his lordship thought sternly. "You have gone the length of your tether, Sir Arthur Trevenna; it is high time to pull you up."

Miss Herncastle went up to her room, but not to bed. She sat down by the open window, a starry light in her eyes, almost a flush of color on her marble face.

"At last! at last! at last!" her lips said.

She was smiling—a smile not good to see. Her eyes were

fixed on the night prospect, but she saw nothing. So, for upward of an hour, she sat. She could hear the sounds from below, the music, the soft hum of voices, the low laughter. She could hear, but she hardly seemed to listen. She was wrapped in herself; that glowing, exulting face, you would not have known it again.

"At last! at last!" she kept softly repeating, "my hour has come."

She arose after a time. Even through her absorption the falling dew struck chill. She arose, closed the window and the curtains, lit the lamp, and flung the ivory miniature contemptuously across into an open trunk.

"Lie there," she said; "*you* have done *your* work. I want you no more. I have waited six years—a long time; but even Troy fell at last. I have heard all I wanted to hear. I see my way clear to the end now!"

---

## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE SCAR ON THE TEMPLE.

"I TELL you, madam, you shall not go!"

"And I tell you, sir, I *shall!*"

"Lady Dangerfield, I repeat it, you shall never go to that disreputable woman's house in that disgusting dress.'

"Sir Peter Dangerfield, *I* repeat it, as sure as the night after to-morrow night comes, I will go to Mrs. Everleigh's masquerade in the costume of a page."

And then husband and wife stood still. and paused for breath, and glared at each other, as much more devoted husbands and wives will do at times in the marital relation, I am told.

It was three days after Sir Peter's attack, and for two days the little baronet had been sufficiently recovered to enliven the drawing-room with the brightness of his presence. All at once the solitude of his study had become unbearable to him; his bugs and beetles, his bees and butterflies afforded him no consolation. Lights, life, human faces, human voices, he craved them day and night. And so it came about, in the first time of

Lady Dargerfield's experience of him, her husband had nothing else to do but watch her and grow jealous. Horribly and ferociously jealous. He didn't care a pin's point in the way of love for his wife, but she *was* his wife, and as long as a lady is that, the gentleman whose name she honors has legal right certainly to most of her tender looks, whispered sentences, twilight walks, etc., etc. And Sir Peter got none of these, and Major Frankland got a great many. In reality, in her heart of hearts, if my lady possessed such an inmost sanctuary, she really cared as much for one as the other. A fine fortune, a fine establishment, fine dresses, superfine dinners—these were the things my lady loved, above husband, child, or lover. But all these things she had, and Major Frankland was very good-looking, could flatter ceaselessly, knew the art of love *à la mode* to perfection, and was very willing to pay in tender glances, dreamy tête-à-têtes, whispered nothings, for the excellent Scarswood dinners, wines, horses, billiards, and the rest of it. And to do him justice, he did not know Sir Peter was jealous; he meant no harm, only "this sort of thing" helped make the long summer days pass; and if my lady liked to flirt, and Sir Peter did not object, why shouldn't *he* show his gratitude and become flirtee as well as any other man? In a round dance my lady's step suited him, their intellects were on an average, they knew the same people, liked to talk of the same things, both were well looking, unexceptionable of dress and style—that is what it came to, and where was the harm? Major Frankland did not think of this—Major Frankland never thought at all if he could help himself. But that was the sum total of his and my lady's platonic friendship.

In a vague, hazy sort of way, Sir Peter had long been a chronic victim to a mild form of the green-eyed monster. All at once in these two days the mild, harmless symptoms became furiously aggravated, and the little baronet turned rampantly jealous. He had nothing else to do but watch his wife, and her attendant cavalier, and he *did* watch them. He lost his fear of ghosts, his interest in Miss Herncastle almost, in this new phase of things. He sat in a corner with a big book, and glowered vengefully over the top of it at the placid face of the major and the vivacious face of his wife.

Mrs. Everleigh's fancy dress party brought matters to a climax.

Mrs. Everleigh was an exceedingly charming lady, of whom Castleford knew very little indeed, except that she was exces

sively rich, very fond of spending her money, and enjoying herself, and—a divorced wife. Where Mr. Everleigh was, and *why* he had put away the wife of his bosom, a great many asked and nobody answered. Mrs. Everleigh herself put her perfumed *mouchoir* to her blue eyes when the harrowing subject was alluded to—called Mr. Everleigh a brute and herself a martyr, and left things in their general misty and uncomfortable state of doubt. But she dressed elegantly, lived luxuriously, gave the most brilliant receptions far or near. The more fastidious ladies of the neighborhood, Lady Cecil among them, fought shy of the charming Mrs. Everleigh. Lady Dangerfield and she became bosom friends at once. And this week Mrs. Everleigh's masquerade came off—the only thing of its kind that had been dreamed of—and my lady and the major were going. The major as the "Chief of Lara," gloomy and splendid, and misanthropical, in black velvet and plumes, like a mute at a funeral, and my lady was going as Kaled, Lara's page—the devoted, the adoring Kaled. By the merest chance, for my lady never annoyed her nervous husband with these foolish trifles, he had discovered the ball, the costume, everything that he would have been much better off without knowing, and his brimming cup flowed over! He flew into a passion; his wizen little face turned purple with rage; he absolutely swore; he stamped his small foot, and screeched forth in passionate falsetto, that my lady should not go.

"And I tell you I shall!" my lady retorted, also flying into a towering passion, and using none too ladylike language in her sudden fit of rage. "Don't make a greater fool of yourself, Sir Peter Dangerfield, than nature has already made you. It's no affair of yours. Attend to your bugs and horrid crawling things, your ghosts and your gambling. Oh, yes, *I* know where you were the night you saw the ghost under the King's Oak. I don't interfere with your amusements—be good enough not to interfere with mine."

She had trodden on her worm so long that she had forgotten even worms sometimes turn. She had gone just a step too far. The purple hue of rage left his face; it turned a ghastly yellow. He folded his small arms across his small chest, he planted his small feet resolutely on the carpet, and he stood and looked at her.

"You mean to go, then, Lady Dangerfield?"

"I mean to go, as surely as you stand there, Sir Peter Dangerfield."

"In this disgusting dress?"

"You called it disgusting once before. I don't perceive the disgusting. It's a beautiful little dress, and I expect to look lovely in it."

"You mean to go to this disreputable woman's house?"

"You said *that* before also, Sir Peter. Don't let Mrs. Everleigh hear you, or she may bring action against you for defamation of character. Her husband was a brute, and she had to leave him—nothing very uncommon in that—most husbands are. She has her own fortune, and she enjoys herself in her own way. I suppose it *is* infamous for a woman who has ever had the misfortune to marry to presume to enjoy herself after."

"You mean to go to Mrs. Everleigh's masquerade! You mean to go in male attire!—you, the mother of two children! —a woman thirty-five years of age!"

*That* was too much. Lady Dangerfield might have endured a great deal; but this last insult—this cold-blooded mention of her age—no, she could *not* stand that. What right-feeling woman, indeed, could?

"You little wretch!" cried Sir Peter's wife; and for a moment the words, and the tone, and the look, brought Katherine Dangerfield, and the conservatory, and six years, back vividly before him. "How dare you use such language as that to me? If I never meant to go I should go now. Five-and-thirty, indeed! I deny it; it is a base falsehood! I shall not be thirty-one until next birthday. And *I shall* go to Mrs. Everleigh's, and *I shall* go as a page just as sure as Thursday night comes!"

"And with Major Frankland, Ginevra?"

"With Major Frankland—a gentleman at least, who does not insult ladies to their faces by odious falsehoods about their age. Thirty-five, indeed! I have no more to say to you, Sir Peter Dangerfield, only this—I shall go!"

"Very well, Lady Dangerfield,"—he was yellower than ever —he was trembling with passion; "then hear *me*. If you go to Mrs. Everleigh's as page to that man's knight, then—remain with Mrs. Everleigh—don't come back here. I have endured a good deal; I will not endure this. Go if you will; I shall not lift a finger to prevent you; but—don't come back. Scarswood is *mine;* the mistresses of Scarswood have been honorable women always; you shall not be the first to dwell beneath its roof and disgrace it—that I swear!"

For once in his life he was eloquent, for once in his life he

was dignified. He rose with the occasion; in that moment you would *almost* have respected him. He turned and left the room. His wife stood petrified. Was she awake—was she asleep? Was this Sir Peter Dangerfield? Could she believe her senses?

There was a second auditor to this marital outbreak—an auditor who stood almost as surprised as my lady herself. It was Miss Herncastle, who had entered in the full tide of the discussion, and had stood, not seeming to know exactly whether to go back or go on. My lady turned and saw her now.

"Miss Herncastle!" she cried, in haughty anger. "You—and listening?"

"Not listening, my lady," Miss Herncastle answered, meeting her angry eyes steadily. "You told me this morning when the doublet was completed to tell you, and let you try it on. It is finished, and, obeying your orders, I came in search of you at once."

For Miss Herncastle had been ordered to desert the schoolroom latterly, and turn seamstress in general to my lady. And it was Miss Herncastle who, with boundless taste and good-nature, had suggested the two costumes, and produced a little painting of Lara and Kaled. The major and Lady Dangerfield had both been charmed with the idea. The major was now up in London selecting his costume, and Miss Herncastle had ridden into town with my lady, silk and velvet, lace and feathers had been purchased, the governess and my lady's maid had since sewed, sewed, sewed night and day. Miss Herncastle had *such* taste, such clever fingers, and was altogether a miracle of dexterity and cheerfulness. Lady Dangerfield's ruffled plumage smoothed again.

"So I did. And it is ready? But Sir Peter objects so strongly—is *so* disagreeable—still I must run up and see it."

A faint, derisive smile dawned upon the face of the governess, as she stepped back to let my lady pass her.

"And when you *do* see it—trust me to persuade you to wear it. It will be an easy task, despite the counsels of a hundred husbands." That was what that slight chill smile said plainly enough, as she followed my lady to one of the upper rooms.

The dress lay spread upon a bed—a shining vision of carmine silk, white ostrich plumes, gold braid and black velvet. My lady's eyes lit up like black diamonds, as she lifted the separate articles that composed the costume, and held them up to glisten in the sunlight. Millinery was the one thing of all things earthly, that most closely appealed to this woman's soul.

"Oh!—" a long inspiration. "Miss Herncastle, your taste is perfect—perfect; I never saw anything so lovely. And to think that preposterous little baronet says I shall not wear it. Delphine, take your sewing into your own room—I am going to try this on." Exit Delphine with a curtsey. My lady sinks into a chair. "Do my hair, Miss Herncastle," she says, impatiently; "I shall try it on at least."

Miss Herncastle's deft fingers go to work. Embroidery, costume making, hair dressing—nothing seems to come amiss to these deft white fingers.

"Now, my lady. No, don't look in the glass yet, please. Let me dress you; when everything is on, then you shall look and see the effect."

And then Miss Herncastle set to work in earnest, my lady aiding and abetting. She had locked the door; profound silence, befitting the importance of the moment, reigned. Silken hose, buckled shoes, little baggy silken unmentionables, a doublet of carmine silk, all aglimmer with gold cord and lace and sparkling buttons; a little black velvet cloak, lined with deep rose red, seeming but a brighter shade of the carmine, clasped jauntily a little to one side, and the one end flung back over the shoulder; a little black velvet béret or cap, set on one side the black *crêpé* hair, a long ostrich plume sweeping over the shoulder and fastened at the side by a diamond aigrette; a tiny rapier set in a jeweled scabbard—that was the radiant, sparkling vision my lady's glass showed her. In all her life, she had never looked so nearly beautiful as in this boyish travesty—in this glowing carmine silk, and lofty plume, and black velvet.

"Oh!" she said no more—only that one long-drawn breath. She stood and contemplated the picture in silent ecstasy.

"It is perfect—it is beautiful," Miss Herncastle murmured; "I never saw your ladyship look half so well in anything before, It will be *the* costume of the ball."

"It is lovely—lovely," my lady responded, still staring in an ecstasy; "but Miss Herncastle, I have already told you Sir Peter has taken it into his imbecile head to object—to absolutely forbid. He calls the dress disgraceful—nonsense—and Mrs. Everleigh disreputable. And you have no idea how disagreeable and how obstinate Sir Peter Dangerfield can be when he likes."

Miss Herncastle smiled again—that slight, chill, unpleasant smile.

"Have I not? But I think I *have*. Men have peculiar notions on these subjects, and with a man like Sir Peter, it is much easier to let him have his way than to do combat. They never yield an inch."

"Give way. That means to give up the idea of the ball—to submit to be tyrannized over—not to wear this exquisite dress. Miss Herncastle, do I hear you aright?"

"You hear, but you do not understand. Of course you go to the ball—only—let Sir Peter think you don't. It will be easy enough to deceive him. It may involve a few falsehoods, but your ladyship will not stickle at that. You go to the ball in peace—and he goes to bed in peace, and what he never knows will never grieve him."

"But how is it to be done?"

Miss Herncastle paused a moment in deep thought, her brows knit.

"In this way," she said. "Write to Major Frankland in London, and tell him when he returns to Castleford, on Thursday evening, to *remain* in Castleford, at one of the inns, instead of coming to Scarswood. It is as much on his account as on account of the page's dress that Sir Peter objects. You can tell Sir Peter, if you choose, that you have given up the idea—that Major Frankland has been detained in town. He will not believe it, of course, but when the night arrives and he does not return, and he sees you retire for the night he will. Once in your room, you dress, of course; bribe the coachman to drive you quietly to Mrs. Everleigh's, and wait the breaking up of the ball. At Mrs. Everleigh's you meet the Major; he can keep quiet in the town all the following day, and in the evening come here as though direct from the station. You will have enjoyed the ball, and Sir Peter be none the wiser."

My lady listened in calm approbation, undisturbed by conscientious qualms of any kind.

"A famous idea, Miss Herncastle," she said, as the governess ceased. "What a head you have for plotting and taking people in. One would think you had done nothing else all your life."

Miss Herncastle received this involuntary compliment with becoming modesty, that faint, derisive smile creeping for a second or two around her handsome mouth. But she was busy removing the page's attire, and my lady did not see it.

"If you write to Major Frankland at once, my lady," she said, "I will take your letter to the post-office myself, and he

will get it in time to-morrow. It will simply be doing a kindness to Sir Peter to keep him in the dark about the ball; his imaginary troubles about ghosts are quite enough for him at present."

She placed writing materials before my lady, and my lady, in her spidery Italian tracery, dashed off a page or two to the major, apprising him of the facts, of Sir Peter's unexpected disapproval and Miss Herncastle's clever plan. Before it was signed and sealed, Miss Herncastle, in hat, jacket, and parasol, stood ready to take it into town. It would be a long, hot, dusty walk, but what sacrifices will not friendship make? She took the letter, put it in her pocket, and left the room and the house.

My lady watched her from the window out of sight, and somehow a feeling of distrust and dislike, that had always lain dormant there for Miss Herncastle, rose up and warned her to take care. What was at the bottom of all this willingness to serve and please her? She knew she disliked Miss Herncastle, and she *felt* that Miss Herncastle disliked her. What if she should betray her to Sir Peter, after all? And Sir Peter had looked so uncomfortably in earnest when he had made that threat: "You shall not be the first to dwell beneath the roof of Scarswood and disgrace it—that I swear!" A cold chill came over her for an instant in the sultry summer air. What if she went? What if Miss Herncastle betrayed her? and what if he kept his word?

"It would be wiser to give it up," she thought; "he might keep his word, and then—great Heaven! what would become of me? I *will* give it up." She turned, and her eyes fell on the dress—the carmine silk, the diamond aigrette, the doublet, the béret, the rapier—all her good resolutions faltered and failed at the sight. "I *won't* give it up," she exclaimed, setting her little white teeth. "I'll go, and trust Miss Herncastle, and deceive the jealous, tyrannical little monster, if I can. What motive has she for betraying me? and later, if he does find it out from any other source, his anger will have had time to cool. I would not miss wearing that dress, and having Jasper see how young and pretty I look in it, for a kingdom. Thirty-five years old, indeed! Odious little dwarf! I'll go as surely as I stand here."

Miss Herncastle walked into town over the dusty highroad, under the boiling July sun, and posted my lady's letter. She returned weary, dusty, foot-sore, as the stable clock was strik-

ing six, and as she walked up the avenue, came face to face with Sir Peter and Captain O'Donnell.

The little cowardly baronet had been seized with a sudden and great fancy for the tall, soldierly, fearless Irishman. A confidant of some kind he must have. Frankland was out of the question—Sir Arthur he stood, like most people, in awe of—the earl would have listened suavely and sneered secretly; O'Donnell therefore only remained. And O'Donnell suited him exactly: he had not a grain of fear in his nature; he had a cool head, a steady nerve, and he was intensely interested in the whole affair. O'Donnell had taken it up, had promised to investigate, did not believe it was a ghost, and Sir Peter breathed again.

Both gentlemen bowed to the pale, tired-looking governess. The baronet turned round, and looked darkly and suspiciously after her.

"Where has she been now?" he asked, distrustfully. "What do all these long, solitary rambles mean? Don't you see the likeness, O'Donnell, to the picture of Katherine Dangerfield? You must be blind if you do not."

"Oh, I see a certain likeness," O'Donnell repeated, "but nothing so marked as to be terrifying. By the bye, I was examining the photograph with a magnifying glass and I discovered a mark or scar of some kind on the left side of the face, right above the temple. Now had Katherine Dangerfield a birth-mark there, or anywhere else—the proverbial strawberry mark on the arm, or mole on the neck, or anything of that sort?"

"The line you saw was a scar—the scar of a wound that came pretty near ending her life. On the voyage out to India her nurse let her fall out of her arms; she struck the blunt end of a spike, and gave herself a horrible gash just above the temple. I saw the scar a hundred times; it wasn't very disfiguring, and she never tried to conceal it. A white, triangular scar, that used to turn livid red when she got angry."

O'Donnell listened thoughtfully.

"Humph!" he said, "a scar like that it would be impossible ever to obliterate, even had she lived to be eighty."

"Quite impossible; but why?"

"Oh, only idle curiosity, of course. I noticed the mark, and it set me wondering what it might be." He paused a moment, his eyes on the ground, his brows knit in a thoughtful frown; then he looked up and spoke again, quite abruptly: "you told me, Sir Peter, she died in the house of a man named Otis, I

think—a doctor, who afterward removed to London. Do you know if this man still lives?"

"I know nothing about him, but there is no reason to suppose he does not."

"Was his Christian name Henry?"

Sir Peter paused a moment, and thought.

"It *was* Henry," he answered. "I remember now. Henry Otis, that was his name."

"Was he tall, spare, very light-haired, very sallow complexion and a stoop?"

"Yes, he was. O'Donnell, have *you* seen him? You describe him exactly."

"I think I have. And she died in his house, and was buried from it, you say? How long after did he leave Castleford for London?"

"I don't remember exactly—some months, I think. There were people who said he had fallen in love with Katherine, and was miserable here after her death. She was buried from his house, and he erected that stone to her memory. Then he took his mother and went up to London."

"He and his mother lived alone?"

"They did."

"They kept a servant, I suppose?"

Sir Peter looked at him wonderingly.

"I suppose they did; it was not his mother who opened the door for me when I went there. O'Donnell, what *are* you driving at?"

"I'll tell you presently. If the servant who lived with them at the time of Katherine Dangerfield's death be still alive, it strikes me I should like to see that servant. One question more, Sir Peter, on another subject. Do you know a place some three miles from here—a dismal, lonely sort of house called Bracken Hollow?"

"Certainly I know Bracken Hollow." His voice dropped to a whisper, and he glanced half fearfully around. "Who in Castleford does not? Dismal and lonely! I should think so. Bracken Hollow is a haunted house."

"Indeed," the chasseur said, his hands in his pockets, his face immovable; "it looks like it, I confess. And what manner of ghost haunts it, and who has ever seen him?—that is, supposing it be a him. As far as my experience goes, ghosts are generally of the feminine gender."

"For Heaven's sake, don't talk in that way, O'Donnell," Sir

Peter said nervously, taking his arm. "You don't know *what* may hear you. Bracken Hollow is haunted; most unearthly sounds have been heard there—heard by more than me, and not superstitious people either. A murder was committed there once, many years ago, and they say—"

"Oh, of course they say. That's not evidence. I want to hear what actually has been seen."

"Well—nothing then," Sir Peter responded reluctantly; "but I repeat it—horrible and unearthly cries have been heard coming from that house often, and by many people."

"And none of these people investigated, I suppose?"

"It was none of their business; they were only too glad to give it a wide berth, and go near it no more."

"Who lives at Bracken Hollow?"

"An old woman, named Hannah Gowan. She was Katherine Dangerfield's nurse in her youth, and Sir John pensioned her off, and gave her Bracken Hollow."

"*Whew—w—w—w!*" O'Donnell's low, shrill whistle pierced the quiet air. Katherine Dangerfield's nurse! By George! that accounts—" he stopped.

Sir Peter looked at him, all his never-ending suspicions and fears aroused.

"Accounts for what?"

O'Donnell halted in his slow walk, and laid his hand confidentially on the shoulder of the baronet, and looked calmly down into the baronet's little wizen face.

"Sir Peter," he said, gravely, "a light is beginning to dawn upon me; the mysteries are lifting slowly, but, I think, surely. I can't tell you what I think, what I suspect; I hardly can tell myself yet. All is confused—all is stranger than I can say; but as in a glass, darkly! I begin to understand—to see the end. Wait—give me time. As surely as we both live, this strange mystery shall be sifted to the bottom, and the ghost of Scarswood, the ghost of Bracken Hollow exorcised. Now I am going away by myself to think."

He turned and strolled away, leaving the petrified little baronet standing under the lime-trees, the picture of dazed and helpless astonishment.

The first room the young Irishman passed was the library; its windows stood wide open on the lawn; it looked cool, and dark, and deserted—a suitable place to think. He stepped in, let the sea-green curtains fall again, flung himself into a chair,

his hands still deep in his pockets, his brow still knit in that reflective frown.

The room had seemed very dark, coming in from the glare of the sunset. As, after five minutes he lifted his eyes from the carpet, he found that it was *not* dark. More, he found that he was not alone—the library had another occupant—that occupant Miss Herncastle—Miss Herncastle asleep.

Miss Herncastle asleep! After the first instant's surprise, he sat still and looked at her. It was easy enough to understand how she came to be here. She had passed the windows, as he had done—the dark seclusion of the library looked inviting; she, wearied and warm, had entered, and finding it entirely deserted, had lain down, and all unconsciously fallen asleep. She had removed her hat; one hand pillowed her head; her face, with the light full upon it, was turned toward him. Pitilessly, searchingly, he sat and read that face. The straight, finely shaped nose, the square-cut, resolute lips, the curved, determined chin, the broad, rather low, intellectual-looking forehead. It was perfectly colorless, that face, even in sleep. And in her sleep she dreamed, for her brows were contracted, her lips moved. She looked fairer in her slumber than he had ever thought her awake.

Who was she? A strange woman, surely—a wonderful woman, if the dim, mysterious suspicions adrift in his mind were right. Who was she? Helen Herncastle of London, as she said, or—

An inspiration came to him—an inspiration that lifted him from his chair to his feet, that caught his breath for one breathless moment.

The scar on Katherine Dangerfield's temple!

He hardly knew what he suspected as yet, wild, improbable, impossible things; and yet he did suspect. Now, if ever, was the time to end all suspicions, and test the truth. Miss Herncastle wore her black hair nearly down to her eyebrows; what easier than now to lift one of these shining waves, and look at the left temple—it was the side of the face uppermost.

He advanced—he hesitated. Something in her helplessness—in the sacredness of sleep, appealed to his strength and his manhood, and held him back. It seemed a dastardly deed to do while she slept what he dared not awake. And yet it was his only chance.

"I may be judging her cruelly, shamefully," he thought; "if the scar is not there, I am. For her own sake I will look."

He drew near—he stooped over the sleeping form; very gently he lifted the black waves of hair that covered forehead and temple. A full and noble brow he saw it was those bands of dead dark hair hid. Lifted off, it altered her wonderfully, made her ten times more like the portrait of the dead girl. He glanced at the temple.

Good God! yes! there was the livid triangular scar Sir Peter Dangerfield had described, just above the temple.

He let the hair drop—he absolutely reeled for a second, and grasped a chair. He stood there thunderstruck, spell-bound, looking down at her, helpless to do anything else.

Something in the magnetism of that strange, fascinated gaze must have pierced even the mists of slumber. Without sound of any kind to disturb her, the eyelids quivered, lifted, and Miss Herncastle, wide awake in a second, looked up from the sofa into Redmond O'Donnell's face.

---

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### ROSE O'DONNELL'S SECRET.

FOR a moment—for an hour, it seemed to him—not a word was spoken. His dazed eyes never left her; he stood almost like a man stunned.

She rose up on her elbow, returning his gaze. What did his face, its sudden pallor, showing white even under the golden bronze of his skin, tell her? Something in his eyes cowed her strangely—fascinated her also.

She rose slowly up to a sitting posture and spoke, answering that fixed look:

"What is it?" she asked.

The sound of her voice broke the spell.

He drew a long breath and was himself again. In dealing with this woman, who could be too subtle and too deceiving?

"I have been experimenting in animal magnetism, Miss Herncastle," he said coolly; "in other words, trying if my will, my mesmeric power, could master *you*. I found you asleep—sound asleep—after your walk, and I stood and looked at you and willed you to awake. You obeyed. A liberty on my

part, perhaps, but the temptation was irresistible. You possess a very powerful will of your own, Miss Herncastle; that mine can command it, is no small triumph for me."

Something very like a flush passed over the perfect pallor of Miss Herncastle's face. Her great gray eyes flashed upon him with something more nearly akin to anger than anything he had ever seen in them before. But thorough self-command had long ago become second nature to her. Her sweet voice had all its wonted soft music when she spoke:

"I regret Captain O'Donnell has no better use for his time than watching me, and no better subject for his mesmeric experiments. The Lady Cecil Clive, for instance—did he ever try his mesmeric powers on her, I wonder?"

"No," Captain O'Donnell returned, lying indolently back in his chair, and looking the very embodiment of handsome *sang froid;* "I don't believe the Lady Cecil is a good subject; if she is, I leave her to her rightful owner, Sir Arthur Tregenna, when she can get him, which isn't often of late. And speaking of watching you, Miss Herncastle, I must tell you I have done that once before, lately, on an occasion when I don't think you saw *me.* Not intentionally, as now, at least at first; afterward, I fear, I must plead guilty to the somewhat dishonorable charge. But then again, the temptation was very strong. And upon my word, Miss Herncastle, you are so very mysterious, so very interesting a lady—if you will pardon my saying so—that watching you more than repays one for his trouble."

"Mysterious! interesting! I don't know what you mean, Captain O'Donnell!"

"Oh, yes, I think you do. You must be aware you are an object of mystery and interest to all in this house: if for nothing else, your startling resemblance to that dead girl, Katherine Dangerfield. And then there are the nocturnal walks to Bracken Hollow, a haunted house, whose ghost at least *you* don't seem to fear. And then there are your singular assignations, held in such very singular places. Who, for instance, but mysterious Miss Herncastle would think of giving a gentleman an interview in a—churchyard, at nightfall?"

She set her lips in the line he well knew, and looked at him, hard, full, defiant.

"You understand me, I think. Was it the night before last? Yes, it was. I left Sir Peter Dangerfield's bedside—you remember I relieved you, and let you and Sir Arthur go. We

had been talking, Sir Peter and myself, of the ghost—very strange affair that, by the way—of Katherine Dangerfield, dead and gone, also of the young man Otis, who fell in love with her, and in whose house she died. With my mind full of Katherine Dangerfield, her sad story and misfortunes, I went to Katherine Dangerfield's grave. I thought I had the place all to myself—certainly I never dreamed of its being made a place for lovers' tryst—but I was mistaken. On my way out, between me and the gate two figures stood. Had I not recognized them—*one* of them, rather—I should have passed on, surprised a little at their charnel-house taste, but no more. But I recognized them. If you will excuse me again, Miss Herncastle—there is no mistaking that graceful walk of yours, or that stately poise of the head and shoulders. I knew you; I also, after a moment, knew the man."

Her lips set themselves closer, in that thin, unpleasant line; her gray eyes still shone with that silent, threatening glitter.

"Sir Peter had described him, and I heard you speak his name—Henry. Tall, sallow, thin, stooping, living in London, and named Henry. There was no mistaking—the man was Mr. Henry Otis, surgeon, late of Castleford—the man from whose house Katherine Dangerfield was buried."

For the first time in his knowledge of her, her face changed. It turned gray—a ghastly creeping gray, from brow to chin. For an instant the fearless eyes flinched. For an instant—then she arose herself again, and defied him.

"Well," she said, "what next?"

"I stood, as they say in novels, rooted to the spot, and yet with a sensation of relief. For one moment—only one, Miss Herncastle—I fancied your companion to be Sir Arthur Tregenna. I might have known better. It is possible for a man like that to swerve a little from the straight path of duty: to stoop to deliberate dishonor—never."

She smiled—a smile not pleasant to see.

"Dishonor! an ugly word. For Sir Arthur Tregenna to meet me in private thus—would be for him—dishonor?"

"Most certainly, if he met you as a lover. And he is fast becoming that, though I doubt if he knows it himself yet. For Sir Arthur Tregenna, the plighted husband of Lady Cecil Clive, to meet you, or any woman, in that way, would be dishonor."

"The plighted husband of Lady Cecil Clive," she echoed softly still, with that gleaming smile. "I beg your pardon,

Captain O'Donnell, he is not, he never has been for one second that. And," her eyes flashed up now, in a sudden fire of triumph, "I have but to say it—and he never will!"

He sat still looking at her, pale, and grave, and surprised.

"Never has been? Do you mean to say, Miss Herncastle, that Sir Arthur has not been for years the pledged husband of Lord Ruysland's daughter?"

"No; not for years, not for days, not for hours. He is no more her plighted husband than—than *you* are. Ah! you feel that!" She laughed bitterly as she saw him wince. "You have been, in the best years of her life, what he never was—Lady Cecil's lover. Oh, I know more than you think, Captain Redmond O'Donnell, of that little Irish episode six years old. You saved her life at the risk of your own, and fell in love with her afterwards. Very pretty, very romantic—a very old story indeed. *I* know, but Sir Arthur does not. He is not in love with Lady Cecil *now;* do you think it will help love on to hear that story of her youth—that story she will never tell him?"

Redmond O'Donnell's face had grown cold and set as stone. To the suppressed passion in *her* face, in *her* eyes, in *her* tone, he was deaf and blind. If he had been told Miss Herncastle was rightful heiress to the crown of England, it would have astonished him less—he would have believed it more easily—than that, all unwillingly, she had learned to love him.

"You do Lady Cecil great injustice, Miss Herncastle," he answered, with chill sternness, "in bringing her name into this discussion at all. You wrong her more by your confounded suspicions. Whether she is, or is not, the betrothed bride of Sir Arthur Tregenna, this at least is certain—there is no page in her past life that he and all the world are not free to read More, perhaps," looking her straight in the eyes, "than all can say. I did her the service you speak of in Ireland, six years ago; is there anything in that to conceal? And there the 'story,' as you phrase it, begins and ends. Your suspicions are all unfounded, all unjust. Whatever my folly may have been, in that past time of a most foolish youth, to her I have been ever an acquaintance—a friend, perhaps—no more. Gratitude she gave me—never more."

"Never more!" She turned her scornful face away, and looked out at the opal evening sky. "Ah, well, humility is a virtue but few possess; let us cherish it when we find it in an Irishman, of all men. Repeat that version of the story—believe it if you will. And she gave you—gratitude. What is it

she gives Sir Arthur? What is it he gives *her?* Love, do you think? But she is an earl's daughter, and brought up in the codes and the creeds of her order. She will marry him and his ancient name, and his long rent-roll, if he asks her. *If!* You talk of temptation, Captain O'Donnell—is there no temptation, think you, here for me?"

"To what?" His cold eyes, his cold tones, cut her like knives. "To blind and fascinate him, to make his life miserable, to put him from her, to make him a wanderer over the earth, to spoil the happiness of two lives? *That*, perhaps, it is in your power to do—no more. If you think he will ever marry you—a woman of whom he knows nothing—a woman who, I am very certain, has her own good reasons for hiding her past—you mistake him entirely, Sir Arthur is a very proud man; he comes of a very proud race. The baronets of Tregenna may have married governesses before now—*never* adventuresses."

She turned upon him with eyes of fire:

"Captain O'Donnell!"

"I have said it, Miss Herncastle—you force it from me. Do you think his infatuation will lead him into asking you to be his wife, before inquiring into your past? Will that past bear inquiring into? Sooner than see it, I, myself, would show you to him as you are."

He was still lying back in the easy-chair, his tone quiet, but his mouth, his eyes, relentless as doom. No grim old judge, with the black cap on, pronouncing sentence of death on the wretch in the dock, could have looked more sternly relentless than he.

Her whole mood changed; the swift dark anger died out of her eyes, she sank slowly back in her seat, her hands folded before her, and looked at him.

"Captain O'Donnell," she said, and there was a strange, weary, wistful pathos in her voice, "I asked you before—I ask you again—what have I ever done to you that you should be the one to hunt me down?"

Something in her tone—something in her look—dreary, forlorn—touched him in spite of himself.

"And I answer again—nothing, Miss Herncastle. I have no wish to turn amateur detective, believe me. But Sir Arthur Tregenna is my friend—I cannot see him duped without raising my voice to warn. You have brought discord and wretchedness enough to this house already; go and leave it,

satisfied with what you have done. All that I suspect I shall keep to myself; and I suspect a great deal. But go; leave Sir Arthur to his duty—leave Sir Peter free from ghosts, and if it is in my power to aid or help you in any way, command me But all this plotting, this working in the dark, must end, or else—" He paused.

"Or else it is war between you and me—is that it, Captain O'Donnell? You will devote your man's strength and your man's intellect to hunting down and driving from Scarswood, one poor woman who has never harmed *you*—who earns the bread she eats, and who only takes the goods her gods provide Very well, sir, war let it be. Do your worst—I will do mine. You have called me an adventuress—prove it, if you can. For your other insinuations, I pass them over in silence. The day may come when you will find I have been more sinned against than sinning; when even your spotless, peerless, perfect Lady Cecil may descend from her pedestal, and be known as she is. As she is. I repeat it, Captain O'Donnell. No need for you to do battle in her behalf. By your own showing, she is nothing to you. Do your worst, I repeat—spy upon me when and how you choose, overhear all I say, suspect every word and action, and repeat everything to Sir Arthur Tregenna. I tell you it will be labor lost—he loves me. You hear, most gallant of Irishmen, most courtly of gentlemen—loves me, and as surely as I will it, will one day make me his wife. Tell him this also, if you choose—it will be in keeping with the rest. And I thought you a soldier and a gentleman! Let me pass, Captain O'Donnell—I have no more to say to you."

Once again it flashed out, the passion he had awakened within her, the jealousy he had aroused, and he never saw it. He saw only an angry and utterly base woman at bay, and his heart hardened toward her.

"In one moment," he said. "Believe me, I have little wish to prolong this interview. I have given you your one chance, and you have refused it. It shall be no fault of mine if Sir Arthur Tregenna works his own life-long misery. I warn you fairly—for his sake, for Lady Cecil's, for Sir Peter's. I shall show you to them as you are. One moment more, Miss Herncastle, if you please. In overhearing your remark, in passing out of the churchyard, I also heard you say, 'Marie De Lansac is here.' Now, what has Marie De Lansac—Rose O'Donnell—to do with that man or you?"

Her hand was on the handle of the door. She stopped and

turned to him, a smile of malicious triumph on her face and in her eyes.

"Ah!" she said, "you heard that, did you? What is Marie De Lansac to me? Captain O'Donnell, you accuse me of the guilt of having secrets and mysteries in my life. I wonder if I am alone in that? I wonder if Sir Peter Dangerfield knew every episode in my lady's career? I wonder if her papa and her friends are free to read every page in Lady Cecil's life? I wonder if Redmond O'Donnell knows every incident connected with his pretty, gentle sister's New Orleans existence? What woman tells father, lover, brother—*all?* Not one among all the millions on earth. Captain O'Donnell, answer me this: Did you ever hear from your sister's lips the name of Gaston Dantree?"

"Gaston Dantree." The name had a familiar sound to him, but at that moment he could not tell where he had heard it—certainly not from his sister. The derisive eyes of the governess were upon him; he could not understand the mocking triumph of their glance.

"I have heard that name," he answered, "but not from Rose."

"I thought not. Then I tell no tales. I keep my own secrets, and let others keep theirs. Captain O'Donnell, the dressing-bell rings. I wish you good-afternoon."

She was gone as she spoke. Five minutes after, while he still sat there, mystified, annoyed, perplexed, an opposite door opened, and Lady Cecil came in.

She was dressed to-day in some pale, sea-green, filmy stuff, that floated about her like a cloud, a little foam of point-lace here and there. A cluster of trailing grasses and half-crushed pink buds clasped the soft corsage; trailing sprays of green, and a rose of palest blush, freshly gathered, adorned the light brown hair. She looked like a lily, a naiad queen, like a sea goddess, lacking the shells and sea-water. A more striking contrast to the woman who had left him could hardly be conceived. And she was *not* pledged to Sir Arthur Tregenna—had never been. For one moment a thrill of exquisite delight filled him at the thought—the next he could have laughed aloud at his own folly.

"As though it could matter to me if to-morrow were her wedding day," he thought. "Free or fettered, she is Lord Ruysland's daughter, and I am—a Captain of Chasseurs, with no hope of being anything else to my dying day."

"You here, Captain O'Donnell?" she said. "I did not know it. I came in search of ——" she paused, and a faint color rose in the lily face. "They told me Miss Herncastle was here," she added, hastily; "they must have been mistaken."

"No," the chasseur answered, coolly, "they were not. Miss Herncastle has been here—with me. She only left a moment before you came in."

The faint color deepened in her cheeks. She turned and moved away again.

"I wished to see her. It does not matter—it will do after dinner. You dine with us, I hope, Captain O'Donnell, or do you run away at the sound of the dinner-bell? You did it a day or two ago, and Ginevra was very angry."

She spoke coldly, voice and manner alike, unconsciously frigid. And without waiting for reply, she reopened the door and walked away.

"Miss Herncastle there—with him!" she thought, a sudden, swift, hot pang, that all Sir Arthur's defalcation had never brought there, sharp at her heart; "it is well the days of dueling are exploded, or Sir Arthur might be tempted to call him out."

She hated herself for the hot anger she felt. What was it to her?—what could it matter to her, with whom Captain O'Donnell chose to amuse himself? He was nothing to her, of course—nothing. And she was less than nothing to him; all her beauty, all her witcheries were powerless here, and he took good care to let her see it. But that flush was still on her face, that sharp pain still beneath the sea-green corsage, beneath laces and roses, when she took her place at dinner.

Captain O'Donnell dined with the family, the governess did not. He looked at his sister across a tall epergne of flowers. She was talking to Squire Talbot—Squire Talbot, whom the soft, sad eyes and wistful little face had been enthralling of late, and wondered what Miss Herncastle could have meant. "Gaston Dantree," he mused; he recalled the name well enough now—Katherine Dangerfield's dastardly lover, of course. He had been a native of New Orleans; had Rose known him there? Had her singular whim of visiting this place anything to do with knowing him? The mere suspicion made him warm and uncomfortable.

"I'll ask her after dinner," he thought, "and she will tell me. Can *he* have had anything to do with the change in her?—the gloom, the trouble of her life, that has preyed on her

mind, and broken her health? And if so, how comes Miss Herncastle to know it?"

The ladies left the table. Redmond O'Donnell sat very silent and thoughtful during the "wine and walnut" lapse, before the gentlemen joined him. Fate favored him upon this occasion. Squire Talbot was turning Lady Dangerfield's music, and his sister, quite alone, with a web of rose-pink netting in her hands, sat in the recess of the bay-window. He crossed over and joined her at once.

"Rose," he began, speaking abruptly, "how much longer do you propose remaining in Sussex?"

She looked at him, surprised at the sudden and unexpected question, a little startled by the dark gravity of his face.

"Remain? I—" she faltered and stopped. "Are *you* anxious to go, Redmond? If so, of course—"

"I have no wish to go until the object that brought you here is an object accomplished, Rose. That you have some object in insisting upon coming to this particular place I am quite certain. More, perhaps I can partly guess what that object is."

The rose-hued netting dropped in her lap, her great, dark eyes dilated in sudden terror.

"Redmond!"

"You have not chosen to make me your confidant, Rose, and I ask for no one's secrets, not even yours. Still you will permit me to ask one question: Did you ever know Gaston Dantree?"

Suddenly, sharply, without warning, the question came upon her. One faint, wailing cry, then her hands flew up and covered her face. He was answered.

No one had heard that suppressed cry; the curtains of the recess hid them.

He sat and looked at her almost as pitilessly as he had looked at Miss Herncastle two hours before. In his stern justice Redmond O'Donnell could be very hard—to himself as well as to others.

"I am answered," he said—"you *have* known Gaston Dantree He was a Louisianian—you knew him in New Orleans. He disappeared here: at Castleford the last trace of him is to be found. Was it to discover that trace you came and brought me here? Look up, Rose," he said, sternly, "and answer me."

She feared as well as loved him. Habitually he was very

gentle with her, with all women, but let that stubborn sense of right and wrong of his be roused and he became as iron. Her hands dropped at his stern command, her poor, pale face, all drawn and white with terror and trouble, looked piteously up at its judge.

"Tell me the truth," he ordered, his lips set. "It is too late for further prevarication. You knew this man?"

"I knew him!"

"In New Orleans, before he came here to court and desert, like the craven-hearted dastard he was, Katherine Dangerfield?"

"Yes."

His lips set themselves harder under his long mustache, his blue eyes looked stern as steel.

"I said I asked for no one's secrets, not even yours. I do, Rose. What was he to you?"

She drew away from him once again, hiding her shrinking face in her hands. A dry, tortured sob was her only answer. But her judge and arraigner never relented.

"Was he a lover of yours?"

She made a mute gesture of assent.

"A false one, of course?"

"Heaven help me—yes."

A pause; then—

"Rose, did M. De Lansac know?"

"He suspected. He never knew."

"Did he favor Dantree?"

"No: he forbade him the house."

"And you—you, Rose O'Donnell, stooped to meet him in secret—to make and keep assignations. You did this?"

Again that sobbing sound, again that shrinking away of face and figure. It was reply enough. If Lady Cecil Clive had seen the face of the Redmond O'Donnell who sat in judgment there upon the sister he loved, she would have been puzzled indeed to find much similarity between it and the face of that other Redmond O'Donnell among the Fermanagh hills. He loved his only sister very dearly; he had held her a "little lower than the angels," and he found her to-day with a secret of deceit and wrong-doing in her life—found her false and subtle, like the rest of her sex. Was there no truth in woman—no honor in man—left on the earth. He sat dead silent; it was bitter to him well nigh as the bitterness of death.

His silence frightened her, cut her, as no stinging reproach

could have done. Once again she lifted her face, all white and piteous, to his.

"Redmond!" she cried, with a great gush, "why are you so hard, so bitter? Why do you judge me so harshly? I was very young; I did not know what distrust meant, and I—I—loved him with all my heart. He said he loved *me*, and I—oh Redmond; it is nine years ago—I believed him. I was warned; others—older and wiser, read him aright—told me it was the prospective heiress of M. De Lansac's millions he loved—not Rose O'Donnell. But I loved and trusted, and could not believe. I met him in spite of my grandfather's commands, I received his letters—to my shame I own it. Then our grandfather married—then Clarence was born, and I—learned the truth at last. It was all as they said—he was false, base, mercenary to the core, was the heir, not I, and he left me. Left me without a word, and came here to England. Still, without a word, he returned me my letters and picture. Then—the next thing I heard of him—I saw the mournful story of Katherine Dangerfield in the English papers my grandfather received. From that time I have heard nothing—nothing. I should have told you, perhaps, but—it is not so easy a story to tell—the story of one's own folly and humiliation."

The soft, sad voice ceased; the pale, drooping face turned far away from him in the silvery dusk. But in his face there was little relenting, in his voice little softness, when he spoke.

"The folly of the past I could forgive; the folly of the present, *no*. That you took a girl's fancy for a man's handsome face, and were the dupe of his false words, might be overlooked—is very natural in a girl of sixteen. That a woman of five-and-twenty should still cling to the memory of so despicable a wretch, still pursue him, and drag me, in my ignorance of your secret, into that pursuit—*that* I cannot forgive."

He arose as he spoke, angry exceedingly, wounded, grieved inexpressibly. She seized his hand in a sort of desperation, and clung to it.

"Redmond, you—you don't understand. It is not that. I *don't* care for him; it is all I can do to pray to be kept from hating his memory, whether he be alive or dead. It is that—that I—" Her courage failed as she looked up into that iron face. "Redmond!" she cried; "who has been talking to you—who has told you this?"

"Miss Herncastle," he answered "Your secret, it would

seem, has all along been no secret to her. She bade me ask you two hours ago, what you knew of Gaston Dantree."

"Miss Herncastle!" she could but just repeat the name in her ungovernable surprise.

"Miss Herncastle," he repeated, still very coldly. "If I were in your place, I think I should come to an understanding with that lady. It was against my will I ever came to England. If I had dreamed of your object, I certainly would never have set foot in it. But I trusted Rose O'Donnell. That is all over now—it is only one other lesson added to the rest. When your inquiries concerning Mr. Gaston Dantree are at an end, let me know, and we will depart for France."

Again he was turning away, hurt, angry, grieved beyond words to say. Again she caught his hand and held him fast.

"Redmond! brother—friend! Oh, my God, why will you judge me so hardly? I have deserved it, perhaps, but—you break my heart. If you knew all I have suffered, you might pity—you might forgive."

He withdrew his hand, and turned sternly away.

"I have told you—the past I could forgive easily; the present I cannot."

And then he was gone. For a moment she sat looking after him with eyes of passionate pleading. Then the pride of blood, latent in her, arose. He was hard, he was cruel, he was merciless. If he had ever loved, himself, or suffered, he would not be so pitiless to her. Lanty was wrong—neither Lady Cecil nor any other woman had ever touched his heart of granite.

She sat wounded—humbled—silent. Then all at once the recollection of Miss Herncastle flashed upon her. She had told him—she knew all. All! Rose O'Donnell turned white and cold from head to foot. *Did* Miss Herncastle know all?

She rose up hurriedly and looked down the lighted length of the spacious drawing-rooms. No; Miss Herncastle was nowhere to be seen. Should she seek her in her room? She stood for an instant irresolute. Squire Talbot espied her and turned to cross over. She saw him in time—flight was her only escape. She stepped through the open window and disappeared.

The tall trees of the lime-walk stood up black in the ivory light of the moon. She turned toward it, then as suddenly stopped. For from its somber shadows Sir Arthur Tregenna and Miss Herncastle walked.

The meeting had been purely accidental, on his part, at least. He had gone forth to smoke a cigar, and (was it by accident?) Miss Herncastle had unexpectedly appeared upon the scene. Her head was aching—she had come out for the air. A black lace scarf, artistically draped like a Spanish mantilla, covered her head and shoulders, one white, shapely hand held it in its place. A crimson rose, half shattered, gleamed above one pink ear. She had never looked better in her life—Sir Arthur's eyes pretty plainly told her that. And having "met by chance the usual way," what more natural than that they should take a turn down the lime-walk together.

"Do you return to the drawing-room?" Rose heard him say. "It is beyond all comparison pleasanter here, but—"

"But Sir Arthur Tregenna may be missed," Miss Herncastle's sweet voice supplemented. "No, Sir Arthur, I shall go to my room. Don't let me detain you an instant longer. Thanks again, for the books and the music, and good-night."

Music and books! He had been making her presents then —what would Lady Cecil say to this? She bade him good-night with her brightest smile, waved a white hand in the pearly light, and turned with the slow, stately, graceful motion peculiar to her, and walked away.

He stood, a strange expression of yearning in eyes and face, and watched the tall figure from sight. Then he turned reluctantly—Rose could see it—stepped through the window whence she herself had emerged, and was gone.

"Miss Herncastle!"

Rose O'Donnell's clear voice, ringing along the silence, came to the ear of the governess. She had reached the King's Oak, and was standing, a smile on her lips, on the very spot where Sir Peter had seen the ghost. She turned at the sound of her name, the smile fading away, and confronted the speaker.

"You called, Miss O'Donnell?"

"I called, Miss Herncastle. I wish to speak a word to you. I will not detain you an instant," as the governess shivered ever so little in the soft night air. "Two hours ago you bade my brother ask me what I knew of Gaston Dantree. Miss Herncastle, in my turn I ask, what do *you* know?"

She looked more like her brother, as she spoke, than the governess had ever seen her. She came of a bold and brave race, and some of the fire of that race shone in her eyes now Miss Herncastle returned her gaze steadily.

"You really wish me to answer that question?"

"Certainly, or else I had not asked it. Did you know Gaston Dantree in New Orleans?"

"I never saw Gaston Dantree in New Orleans in my life."

"In England then?"

Miss Herncastle stood looking at her, making no reply.

"You heard me?" Rose O'Donnell repeated; "what do you know of Gaston Dantree and—and *me?*"

Miss Herncastle's lips opened to answer with that excellent brevity of speech that characterized her.

"Everything."

"Miss Herncastle!"

"It is your own fault, and your brother's, Miss O'Donnell, since by that name you prefer to be known."

"That name!" she whispered the two words, came a step nearer, her eyes dilating, her face ashen white.

"Miss Herncastle," she cried, "what do you mean? What do you know?"

"This!" the voice of the governess rose, her mouth grew set and stern—"*this*—that if Gaston Dantree be alive, you are Gaston Dantree's wife!"

---

## CHAPTER XIX.

### KNIGHT AND PAGE.

IT was a noticeable fact—noticed chiefly by Sir Arthur Tregenna and Squire Talbot—that neither Miss Herncastle nor Miss O'Donnell returned to the drawing-room. For Captain O'Donnell, he did not even perceive his sister's absence. He sat a little apart from the others, turning over a book of photographed celebrities, and never seeing one of them. One question was revolving itself over and over again in his brain until he was dizzy. Had Katherine Dangerfield died six years ago, or had she not? If she had not, who then lay in that quiet grave in the Methodist churchyard? If she *had*, who then, in the name of all that was wonderful, was Helen Herncastle? He thought, till his brain was dazed.

Lady Cecil Clive, with Sir Arthur seated near her, glanced furtively across the length of the drawing-room at Redmond O'Donnell's dark, tired face and somber, blue eyes, and wondered, with a sort of awe, of what he could be thinking so intently and sternly.

"There is but one way," he said to himself, moodily; "a way I hate to take, and yet—for every one's sake—for Rose's—for Tregenna's—for Sir Peter's—it should be taken. If Katherine Dangerfield was buried six years ago, Katherine Dangerfield cannot be here. My mind is made up." He rose with the air of one who shakes off a burden. "I'll wonder no longer. No possible harm can come of it, and it will put an end to this juggling ghost-seeing—this mystification. *I'll do it.* And I'll begin the first thing to-morrow morning."

He took his leave and went home. It was a brilliant summer night, and, as he neared the fields, he stopped and looked suspiciously around. But if he looked for Miss Herncastle, no Miss Herncastle was to be seen. It was long past midnight when he reached the Silver Rose, but even then he did not go to bed. He lit a cigar, and sat down by the open window to smoke and think. The town was very quiet, the lights all out—the stars and Captain O'Donnell had the peace and beauty of the sweet July night all to themselves. He sat there, darkly thoughtful, for over an hour. When he threw himself on his bed he had thought it all out; his whole plan of action lay clear before him.

At ten o'clock next morning he began. He took his way through the town, to that pleasant cottage adjoining the churchyard wherein Katherine Dangerfield six years ago had died.

"I have warned her," he thought, "and she will not be warned. She must take the consequences now."

A family, named Wilson, resided in the cottage at present—that much he had ascertained at his inn. They had taken possession the very week in which Mr. Otis had left, and had been there ever since. Mrs. Wilson, a rosy little matron, answered the door in person, and ushered her military visitor at once into the parlor. Captain O'Donnell's business with Mrs. Wilson was very simple. He understood that the servant woman who had lived in the family of Mr. Otis, six years ago, was now in the service of Mrs. Wilson. His business was with that servant—could he see her a moment or two in private?

The little mistress of the cottage opened two bright, brown

eyes in surprise, but answered readily in the affirmative He meant Dorcas, of course—Dorcas had come to her with the house, and Dorcas was in the kitchen at present, and would wait upon the gentleman at once.

Mrs. Wilson went and Dorcas came—a stout, elderly woman, with an intelligent face.

"I wish to obtain a few particulars concerning the sudden death of a young lady in this house six years ago," the chasseur began, plunging into his subject at once. "You remember her, of course? Her name was Katherine Dangerfield."

Yes, Dorcas remembered perfectly well, remembered as though it were yesterday. She had come to the cottage late in the evening—a cold, dark winter evening it was—to see the sick young man, Mr. Dantree. Mr. Otis himself had let her in. The next thing she heard, half an hour later, was Mrs. Otis scream. Had rushed in. Miss Dangerfield was lying then on the sofa, white and still, and Dr. Graves said she was dead.

"You saw her dead?"

"Yes, poor dear, and a beautiful corpse she made, calm, and white, and peaceful, and looking more as though she were asleep than dead."

"How long was she kept here before she was buried?" the soldier asked.

"Only two days, sir, and she looked lovely to the last. I remember her well, lying in her coffin, with flowers all round her like marble or waxwork, and misses a-crying over her and master with a face like white stone. I saw it all, sir, saw the coffin-lid screwed down, saw her carried out, and a fine, respectable funeral she had—all the gentry of the neighborhood, poor dear young lady."

"Humph!" Captain O'Donnell said, knitting his brows. Katherine Dangerfield *had* died then, and Miss Herncastle had nothing whatever to do with her, in spite of all the astounding coincidences. "One question more, my good woman; how long after the funeral was it that Mr. Otis left this place for London?"

"About a month, sir—yes, just a month. I think they would have gone sooner, but for the unexpected arrival of his cousin, the sick young lady from Essex."

Captain O'Donnell had risen to go. At these last words he suddenly sat down again.

"The sick young lady from Essex. Ah! I think this may be

what I want to hear. When did you say the sick young lady came?"

"On the very identical night of the funeral, sir, and most unexpected. I had gone to bed, and misses, she came to my room next morning before I was up, all white and in a tremble, and says to me, 'Dorcas, get up at once and heat water for a bath;' and then she sat down in a chair, looking fit to drop. I asked her if any one was sick, and she said yes, a young lady who had come in the night, a niece of hers from Essex, and who was going to stop with them a few days. She begged me to keep it a secret. The young lady was weak-like in her intellect, and they would be obliged to confine her to her room. I promised not to speak of it, for misses she looked trembling and frightened to death almost. And so she was all the time the strange young lady was in the house."

"How long was that?"

"Not quite a fortnight, sir; and a sight of bother she made—all her meals took up to her room, and misses a-trotting up and down all day long, a-waiting upon her herself."

"What was she like—this young lady?"

Dorcas shook her head.

"That I couldn't tell, sir. I never laid eyes on her, leastwise except once. Master and misses they kept waiting on her, all day long, and misses she slept with her in the same room at night."

"But you saw her once?"

"Yes, sir, but it was by an accident, and at night. I didn't see her face. She never stirred out all day long, and at night I used to hear sounds of footsteps, and doors softly opening and shutting. One night I watched, I heard the house door shut softly, and directly after I espies master walking in the back garden with a lady on his arm. It was a cloudy sort of a night, and I couldn't see her very plainly—I couldn't see her face at all. She was tall, and dressed in dark clothes, and—but this was only a notion of mine—if Miss Dangerfield hadn't been dead and buried, I should have said the height and the figure were like hers."

The blood rose dark and red over the sun-browned face of the African soldier. For an instant his breath seemed fairly taken away.

"Well?" he said in a tense sort of whisper.

Dorcas looked at him in surprise.

"Well, sir," she said, "the very next night after that the

sick young lady ran away. I don't know whether they had been keeping her against her will or not, but in the dead of night she ran away. When misses awoke next morning she found the bed empty, the door unlocked, and Miss Otis (they called her Miss Otis) gone. She screamed out like one crazy, and ran down in her night-clothes to master's room. I saw him as he came out, and except when he looked at Miss Dangerfield dead in her coffin, I never saw him wear such a face; I declare it frightened me. He searched the house and the garden, but she was nowhere to be found. Then he set off for the station, and discovered (I heard him tell his mother so) that a tall young lady, dressed in black and closely veiled, had gone up to London by the very first train. That same day, he got a telegraph dispatch from London, and he went up at once. He came back in three days, looking dreadfully gloomy and out of spirits. His mother met him in the hall and said, 'Well, Henry, is she safe?' in a flurried sort of a way, and he pushed her before him into the parlor, and they had a long talk. Miss Otis never came back, and two weeks after master and mistress went up to town themselves for good. That's all, sir."

It was quite enough. Captain O'Donnell rose again; his grave face had resumed its usual habitual calm; he had heard all he wanted—more than he had expected. He pressed a half sovereign into Dorcas' willing palm, bade Mrs. Wilson good-morning, and departed.

His face was set in a look of fixed, steady determination as he quitted the cottage and returned to Castleford. He had taken the first step on the road to discovery—come what might, he would go on to the end now.

The middle of the afternoon brought Lanty Lafferty to Scarswood Park with a note from the captain to Miss Rose. It was only a brief word or two—saying he had gone up to London by the mid-day train and would probably not return for a couple of days.

Miss O'Donnell was in her room, suffering from a severe attack of nervous headache, when this was brought her. She looked at the bold, free characters—then pressed her face down among the pillows with a sort of groan.

"And I intended to have told him all to-day," she said, "as I should have told him long ago if I had not been a coward. To think—to think that Miss Herncastle should have known from the first. Ah! how shall I ever dare tell Redmond the pitiful story of my folly and disobedience."

**That day**—Wednesday—passed very quietly; it was the treacherous lull that precedes all storms. Miss Hemicastle kept her room; she was putting still a few finishing touches to that lovely page dress. Late on Wednesday evening came from town a large box addressed to Major Frankland; my lady and the governess alone knew that it contained Count Lara's costume. My lady was on her best behavior to her husband—go to the masquerade she was resolved, and brave all consequences. Sir Peter might never find it out, and if he did—well, if he did it would blow over, as other storms had blown over, and nothing would come of it.

There were others who judged differently. Some inkling of what was brewing, something of what Sir Peter had said, reached the ears of Lord Ruysland, and Lord Ruysland had ventured in the most delicate manner to expostulate with his willful niece. The game was not worth the candle—the masquerade was not worth the price she might pay for it. Better humor Sir Peter and his old-fashioned prejudices and throw over Mrs. Everleigh.

Ginevra listened, her eyes compressing—a gleam of invincible obstinacy kindling in her eyes. She was one of those people whom opposition only doubly determined to have their way.

"That will do, Uncle Raoul. Your advice may be good, but I should think your three-score years' experience of this life had taught you nobody ever yet relished good advice. I'll go to the Everleigh party—I'll wear the page dress and snap my fingers at Sir Peter Dangerfield. *His* threats indeed! Poor little manikin! it's rather late in the day for him to play the rôle of Bluebeard. I shall go."

The earl shrugged his shoulders and gave it up. He never argued with a woman.

"Certainly you'll go, my dear—I knew perfectly well how useless remonstrance would be, but Cecil *would* have it. Go, by all means. Whatever happens I shall have done my duty. Let us hope Sir Peter may never hear it."

"Your duty! The Earl of Ruysland's duty!" his niece laughed contemptuously. "I wonder if all that paternal solicitude is for me or himself? If Sir Peter turns me out of Scarswood, you must follow, Uncle Raoul! The dress is made, and my promise given. I shall go to the masquerade."

Thursday came—that delusive quiet still reigned at Scarswood. When the afternoon train from London rushed into the Castleford station there appeared among the passengers Cap

tain O'Donnell and Major Frankland; and placid and patrician pacing the platform, the Earl of Ruysland.

"Ah, O'Donnell—back again. You don't know, I suppose, that your sister is quite indisposed. I regret to say such is the case—nervous attack or something vague of the sort. How do, Frankland? On your way to Scarswood? Permit me to accompany you there."

But the major drew back in some trifling embarrassment. He wasn't going to Scarswood this afternoon; to-morrow—ah—he intended to put in an appearance. Would his lordship be kind enough not to mention having seen him at all?

The earl's serene blue eyes were tranquilly fixed on the major's face.

"I understand," he answered, "you are down on the quiet—Sir Peter is to hear nothing of it until after the ball? Is that your little game, dear boy? You see I know all about it, and my age and my relationship to Lady Dangerfield give me the right to interfere. Now, my dear fellow, that masquerade affair must be given up."

He took the younger man's arm, speaking quite pleasantly, and led him away.

"Do you know why I took the trouble to drive four miles under a blazing July sun, over a dusty July road, to wait five minutes in a stuffy station for the 2:30 express, dear boy? To meet and intercept you—to ask you as a personal favor to myself, as an act of friendship to Ginevra, not to go to this fancy ball?"

"My lord," interrupted Major Frankland, uneasily, "am I to understand Lady Dangerfield has commissioned you to—"

"Lady Dangerfield has commissioned me to do nothing—has ordered me, indeed, to stand aside and mind my own business. All the same, I am Lady Dangerfield's nearest male relative, and, as such, bound to warn her of her danger. Failing to impress her, I come to you. As a gentleman and a man of honor—as an old friend of poor Ginevra's, you will perceive at once the force of what I say."

"Indeed. You will pardon my stupidity if I fail to perceive it as yet."

"It lies in a nutshell. Sir Peter Dangerfield does you the honor of being infernally jealous. *That* is an old state of things—this masquerade at that woman's house has brought matters to a climax. He has told Lady Dangerfield that if she goes she shall not return, and, my dear Frankland, he means it.

They are both as obstinate as the very devil—she to go, he to separate from her if she does. Now this is a very serious state of things. She is willfully blind to her danger, but you will not be. You are the only one who can prevent this disastrous termination—on you we all depend. There is but one thing for you to do—don't go. Stay!—I know what you would say. You have promised—your dress is in the house—Lady Dangerfield will be offended, et cetera. Granted—but is it not better to break a promise that involves so much? Is it not better to temporarily offend Ginevra than ruin her for life? Frankland, as a man of the world, you cannot fail to perceive that but one course is open to you—to withdraw. Trust me to make your peace. In three weeks she will see from what you have saved her, and thank you."

The gallant major gnawed his military mustache in gloomy perplexity.

"Confound the little bloke!" he burst out. "It isn't that I particularly care to go to this masquerade junketing, but I know Gin—Lady Dangerfield has set her heart on it, and will be proportionately disappointed. Are you quite sure, my lord, that he means to carry out his absurd threat? that he—oh, hang it all! he *couldn't* separate from her for such a trifle as that."

"Could he not?" the earl answered quietly. "I find you don't altogether appreciate the force of such characters as Peter Dangerfield's. The obstinacy of a mule is gentle, yielding, compared to it. And, by Jove, Frankland, in this case he will have grounds to go upon. Lady Dangerfield, against his express command, goes to a masquerade at the house of a woman of doubtful reputation, in male attire, and in the company of a man who has been her lover, and of whom he is monstrously jealous. He warns her of the consequences, and in her mad recklessness she defies them all. Egad! if he does turn her out to-morrow morning, I for one won't blame him. You and Ginevra will act in every way, of course, as your superior wisdom may suggest. I have no more to say, only this—if you and she really persist in going, I and my daughter shall pack our belongings and depart by the earliest train to-morrow. I have spoken."

He turned to go. Still lost in dismal perplexity, still angrily pulling his ginger mustaches, still gloomy of tone, the badgered major spoke.

"I say—my lord—hold on, will you? What the deuce is a

fellow to do? I can't go off to London again, if that is what you mean—oh, hang it no! without a word of explanation or excuse, or that sort of thing. I can't, you know—the thing is impossible."

"Write a note—invent any excuse you please. Your nearest relative, from whom you have expectations, is in *articulo mortis*, and demands your presence to sooth his last hours. Anything will do—say what you please. She'll be in a furious passion at the disappointment, but you save her, and virtue is its own reward, and all that. I promise to bring her to see matters in their true light in a week."

"My lord," the major cried resolutely, "I must see her. I'll tell her myself—I'm blessed if I know what. But I won't go to the masquerade—I promise you *that*."

He stalked gloomily away as he spoke, leaped into a fly, and was whirled off in a cloud of dust. The earl looked after him with a slight smile, in which his habitual sneer lurked.

"Poor children—how vexed they are at losing their toy. He'll keep his word, however—he's not half a bad fellow, Frankland—a tailor's block, with an inch and a quarter of brain. Nothing is farther from my intentions than to permit a rupture between Ginevra and her imbecile husband, if I can prevent it. At least until Cecil's prospects are defined more clearly; and *that* day of reckoning must come very soon. As I said, Sir Arthur has run the length of his tether—it is high time to pull him short up."

He turned to look for Captain O'Donnell, but Captain O'Donnell had long since disappeared. He had lingered an instant to speak a hurried word to a disreputable-looking fellow who had emerged from a third-class carriage—a cockney evidently of the lowest type—a singular-looking acquaintance for Redmond O'Donnell, the earl would have thought had he seen him. But he had not seen, and after listening to a brief direction given by the Algerian officer the fellow had touched his battered hat and slouched on his way.

And in a very perturbed state of mind indeed Major Frankland made his way to Scarswood Park. What he was to say to my lady, what excuse to offer, how to get out of his promise, he had not the remotest idea. What she would say to him he knew only too well. As the railway fly flew along he could see in prospective the sharp black eyes flashing—hear the shrill voice reproaching—the storm of rage and disappointment with which she would sweep from his presence and order him

never to approach her again. And their platonic friendship had been so agreeable and Scarswood had been such a pleasant country refuge after the London season. Confound the little jealous baronet, and trebly confound him. What asses some husbands made of themselves for nothing at all.

What should he say? He reached the park with that momentous question still unanswered and unanswerable. What *should* he say? He bade the fly wait—he wanted to be driven back presently to catch the next up-train. WHAT should he say? With his "inch-and-a-quarter of brain" in a whirl from the unwonted exertion of thinking, he walked up the avenue, and under the King's Oak came face to face with Miss Herncastle.

She was reading—she was alone. Major Frankland took off his crush hat, all his flurry and guilt written legibly on his usually placid face.

"Aw—Miss Herncastle—how do? Is—aw—*is* my lady at home?"

"My lady is not at home, Major Frankland; and if she had been"—Miss Herncastle's large, grave eyes looked at him meaningly—"*you* are the last person she would have expected to see at Scarswood this afternoon."

"Then you know—"

"I know all about the note, warning you not to appear here until after the masquerade. My lady is absent to-day, with Lady Cecil and Miss O'Donnell, at an archery party at Morecambe, and Sir Peter is in close attendance. Do you think it wise to run counter to my lady's commands in this fashion?"

"Miss Herncastle, I—I'm not going. I've promised the earl. He's told me all about the little baronet's flare up, and threats, and all that nonsense, if Lady Dangerfield accompanies me to the masquerade. The party will be a very pleasant party, no doubt, as parties go; but it isn't worth all that, and I'm not the sort of man to make family trouble. The earl wanted me to write an excuse, but I ain't clever at that sort of thing. Gin—Lady Dangerfield—will be deuced angry, no doubt, and you'll deliver it, and take my part as well as you can, Miss Herncastle—hey?"

With vast hesitation, many pauses, numberless "aw's" and "er's," much pulling of the auburn mustache, the major got out this speech. The lurking smile of amusement to Miss Herncastle's eyes he did not see.

"Major Frankland's sentiments do him honor. Sir Peter is certainly rampant on this point, and unpleasantly in earnest.

Here is my book, Major Frankland; it will serve as a desk to write your note."

"And—aw—you *think* my lady will make no end of a row, don't you, Miss Herncastle?" the major asked, wistfully.

"I think she will be annoyed, beyond doubt. You see the dress is very pretty; she has quite set her heart upon going, and opposition has only made her more determined. Here is a pencil, if you have none; and the blank page will do for your note."

With an inward groan of apprehension, the major scrawled two or three lines of incoherent excuse—he hardly knew what. He did not dare read it; he folded it up in the correct cockade fashion, and handed it to the governess. The man who hesitates is lost; he turned to go the instant he finished.

"You'll give Lady Dangerfield this, Miss Herncastle, and be good enough to explain that it is solely for her sake, and against my will that I don't go. Aw—thanks very much, and good day."

He bowed in his agitation with something less than his ordinary exquisite grace—walked back to the fly—jumped into his seat, and was driven off. Miss Herncastle, standing perfectly still, under the King's Oak, watched him out of sight, then she slowly and deliberately tore the note into minutest morsels and scattered them in a little white shower over the grass.

"My lady shall not be disappointed of the ball upon which her heart is set, even for *your* scruples, major. No jealous husband shall prevent my masterpiece of millinery—the page's costume—from adorning Mrs. Everleigh's ball. And whether you are in London or Castleford, Major Frankland, Count Lara shall dance with his Kaled to-night."

My lady and her party returned from Morecambe in time for dinner. Sir Arthur was in attendance upon Lady Cecil, looking bored and *distrait*. Squire Talbot was hovering in the wake of Rose O'Donnell, whose small dark face had grown wanner and thinner than ever in the last two days, and who looked much fitter for a sick bed than an archery party. Miss Herncastle smiled again as she looked at her and the baronet—the one shrinking, the other brightening under her glance. In different ways the spell of her power was upon both.

It had been agreed that the package in Major Frankland's room should be sent to the Silver Rose after nightfall by one of the servants. "Don't disturb yourself about it, my lady," Miss Herncastle had said; "*I'll* attend to all that." She did attend

to it by quietly concealing the box in her own room a little before the archery party returned.

Sir Peter came to dinner; quietly but steadily he had kept his wife under surveillance ever since his discovery of the masquerade. He had shut up his study, his beetles and bugs—he had forgotten the ghost—the pilgrimage to the cemetery—his interest in Miss Herncastle—in this new interest. He had long groaned in spirit under his wife's tyranny and flirtations. Now or never was the time to bring them all to an end. He would watch her as a cat a mouse, and if in spite of all she went to the masquerade in page attire, why go she should, and then—

My lady understood it all, read him like a book, and her rebellious feminine blood rose instantly in revolt. Had death been the penalty she would almost have braved it now. Go she would, but she would be subtle as a serpent and throw him off the track.

In the middle of the afternoon she was seized with a headache, a horrible headache, a vertigo—no doubt caused by too long standing in the hot sun; she must go home at once. She came home with the whole archery party in her wake. She was too ill to dress for dinner, but she made a heroic effort and went down. At table she could not eat a mouthful—after dinner in the drawing-room she was absolutely unable to hold her suffering head up. She *must* retire—a darkened room—perfect quiet—a long night's sleep—unlimited eau de cologne and sal volatile, these things alone could restore her. If they did not, then the family medical attendant must be summoned in hot haste from Castleford to-morrow. Her husband looked at her as she arose amid a low murmur of sympathy, her hand to her forehead—not a trace of rouge on the sallow pallor of her face—with the grin of a small demon.

"Let us hope your headache will not prove so serious as all that, my lady," he remarked. "Your vertigo (how odd you never had a vertigo before) I am quite sure will be entirely gone to-morrow."

"He means mischief," Miss Herncastle thought, watching him from her cover. "He sees through her transparent ruse, and will follow her to the ball. The Fates are working for me as well as I could work myself."

She glided unobserved from the room after my lady, and joined her in the violet boudoir. A substantial repast was spread here. Lady Dangerfield's appetite was unexceptionable, and she had had no dinner. In an instant every trace of

headache and vertigo disappeared. The door was locked, the heavy curtain of violet cloth dropped over it, Lady Dangerfield sat down to refresh her inner ladyship, and Miss Herncastle produced the exquisite page dress. The idea of doubting Major Frankland's appearing was too preposterous an idea ever to occur to her.

"And you think—you are sure, Miss Herncastle—Sir Peter has not the faintest suspicion?" my lady asked, as she rose from the table, and placed herself in the skillful hands of her governess, to be dressed. Delphine had been dismissed as not sufficiently trustworthy. "You are perfectly sure he suspects nothing?"

"I am perfectly sure of nothing in this lower world, except that I *am* in it," Miss Herncastle answered coolly; "but the probabilities are he does not. Major Frankland is in London—you are ill in bed of headache—how then can either of you be at the ball? And it doesn't seem likely he will accept Mrs. Everleigh's invitation himself and go." Lady Dangerfield gave a faint shriek.

"Good Heaven, Miss Herncastle! what an idea!—Sir Peter go. Of course, he'll not go—the very idea is absurd. I don't believe he ever attended a ball in his life, and he detests Mrs. Everleigh much too cordially even to cross her threshold. I wish you wouldn't suggest such preposterous things—I was nervous enough before, you have made me a hundred times worse. Has the box gone yet?"

"The box is safely disposed of, my lady. Have no fears—Count Lara will be there."

Her nimble fingers flew over her work. Lady Dangerfield's short black hair was artistically curled over her temples and shoulders, and the little plumed cap set sideways thereon. The little high-heeled shoes, with their glittering paste buckles, were on; doublet, hose, cloak, rapier, scented gloves, all; the exquisite tint of rouge given to the cheeks, the eyes darkened, all the mystic ceremonies of the toilet gone through; and my lady, robed and radiant, looked in the full-length mirror, and saw a charming vision—all velvet, gold lace, flashing buttons, carmine, silk, and waving plumes. Her sallow cheeks actually flushed under their *rouge végétal*.

"It is exquisite—it is lovely!" she murmured. "I have not looked half so well in anything for years—it brings my waning youth back—I fancy it will surprise even Jasper. Now, Miss Herncastle, my cloak, and go down quietly and see if the

fly you engaged at Castleford is in waiting. Find out if Sir Peter is in his study, too. Somehow I feel horribly nervous to-night."

"I will ascertain," Miss Herncastle's soft voice answered, as she moved noiselessly from the room.

Horribly nervous. Yes, my lady was that. Was it some dim presentiment that with her own hand she was flinging away to-night all that made the happiness of her shallow life? If Sir Peter should come to the masquerade—if he should find it out.

"You shall not live under my roof and dishonor it—that I swear!" were these not the words he had used? And he had been so quiet—he had looked so grimly in earnest. What if he found it out? What if he kept his word? She shivered a little under her cloak. Was it too late yet? Would it not be wisest to stop at the eleventh hour, forego the party, take off the lovely page's dress and stop at—

Miss Herncastle, silent and swift, was back at her side.

"The fly is in waiting. Sir Peter is in his study—the rest still are in the drawing-room—there is not a soul to be seen. Now is your time, my lady, and make haste."

But still for a second she stood irresolute. In that moment one word from Miss Herncastle would have turned the scale either way. That word was spoken.

"Take one last look, my lady—*is* it not exquisite? Mrs. Everleigh will be ready to expire with envy. You look absolutely dazzling in your Kaled dress—you never in your life wore anything half so becoming—Major Frankland will tell you the same. Now, then, my lady, quick."

The scale was turned—the last hesitation over. From that moment until the grand dénouement came, Lady Dangerfield never paused to think.

They descended one of the back stairways—they met no one. Miss Herncastle softly opened a turret door, and they glided through. They made their way in the dim starlight along the shrubbery, skirting a belt of dark woodland, and gained the highroad. In the shadow of a clump of beeches the hired fly waited. A moment and my lady was in; another and she was off as fast as a stout cob could carry her "on the road to ruin."

In Mrs. Everleigh's stuccoed mansion, in Mrs. Everleigh's gorgeous reception rooms, half a hundred lamps shone dazzlingly o'er fair women and brave men. It was the usual scene—nuns

and demons. "Friars of orders gray" in juxtaposition with brigands, hooded Capuchins flirting with ballet dancers, Levantine pirates waltzing with Queen Elizabeth; negroes and flower-girls, Indian chiefs and Spanish donnas—all the grand personages of history and opera, a motley and bewildering spectacle—all masked. And over all clashed out the music. The air was heavy with perfume, the eye grew blind with light, and dazzle, and color.

Among all the brilliant-robed throng there was not one who excited more attention than the little glittering page, Kaled. But where was Lara? An hour had passed since the page's arrival, but the page's master was absent still. And under the silken mask an angry flush was rising at length over the page's face.

What *could* keep Major Frankland? She flung herself into a seat as she asked the question—alone for a brief moment—the first since the ball began. "Did he not come down after all? How dare he disappoint me so? And how absurd I must look—the page without the knight. I'll never—"

She stopped—some one had approached behind her unseen—a voice spoke low in her ear.

"The Chief of Lara has returned again. Look up—my faithful Kaled—my prince and paragon of pages—and welcome your knight and master!"

"The Chief of Lara," in the picturesque dress of a Spanish cavalier, stood behind her, his mask over his face. But for one instant she had not recognized Jasper Frankland's well-known tones. "No—don't reproach me, Ginevra, as I see you are going to do, and as I know I deserve. I couldn't help it—only just got down—serious illness of my grandfather—ought to be by his bedside at this instant. Ah—a redowa—my favorite dance. Come, Kaled, let me look at you. A gem of a dress indeed—it is exquisite. Come."

He whirled her away, but for the first time in her experience the major's step and hers did not agree. For the first moment or two they absolutely could not dance together—then Count Lara seemed to catch it, and they whirled away to the admiration of all beholders.

"What is the matter with you to-night, Jasper?" Lady Dangerfield asked, half-pettishly. "Your voice sounds strange, you don't dance as you used—and—and something about you, I don't know what, looks unfamiliar. Take off your mask, sir and let me see you."

"Not likely, A page must never presume to command his master. Rest assured that I am I, and at supper we will unmask, and become the cynosure of all eyes. Ginevra, your dress is absolutely perfect—there is nothing to equal it here to-night."

A passing domino caught the half-whispered words, and paused to watch them. From that moment, wherever the knight and page went the black domino was sure to follow.

It was an indescribably brilliant party, there was hardly a moment's cessation in the whirl of dancing—the hours flew by like minutes—and Lara and his page never parted company for an instant, whether they waltzed or walked, whether they sought the cool stillness of half-lit balconies and boudoirs, or plunged into the whirl of maskers. And still all unnoticed—stealthily and sure as Fate itself, the black domino followed, and watched, and bided his time.

They wandered into a conservatory at last, filled with the moonlight of shaded lamps, where the music came faint and far-off, and tall tropic plants reared their rich heads far above.

"How hot it is—how noisy they are," Kaled murmured, sinking into a moss-green seat. "I must take off my mask—I shall look as red as a milk-maid when we unmask. In the ten minutes that intervene between this and supper, let me try and get cool if I can."

He stooped over her with the whispered imbecility he knew was expected of him, and fanned her with a palm leaf.

"Shall I fetch you a water-ice?" he asked; "it will help you to feel cool. You will have it eaten before we go to supper."

She assented languidly. Her mask lay in her lap, and watching her with glittering eyes, the spectral domino stood in shadow of the palms. Count Lara's garments brushed him as he went by—but Lara's eyes had noticed him from the first. In a second Count Lara had vanished. My lady, looking flushed and handsome in her boyish travesty, fanned herself in the cool shade of a myrtle-tree. And behind the palms the domino waited.

Both waited for what never came—the return of Count Lara.

The moments passed on—the summons to supper was given—the masqueraders were crowding to the supper-room, and still Count Lara did not appear. In a storm of wrath and impatience, my lady lingered—twice to-night he had made her wait—what did he mean?"

She rose at length when patience had ceased to be a virtue, and taking the proffered arm of an ogre, made her way to the supper-tables. The laughter and excitement were at their wildest—everybody was unmasked—everybody was making the most astounding discoveries—everybody was present—everybody but the exasperating Count of Lara.

No, far or near he was nowhere to be seen. A dozen voices called his name; no one could tell what had become of him. Infuriated, mystified, my lady looked up and down. What was it she saw that made her leap from her seat with a low cry of fear, that drove the blood from her blanched cheeks? She saw—for one instant, amid the crowd, the face—*not* of Major Frankland, but of Sir Peter Dangerfield, looking at her. For one instant only, then it too disappeared.

## CHAPTER XX.

### A DARK NIGHT'S WORK.

WHEN my Lord Ruysland had finished his little paternal lecture to Major Frankland and saw that gallant officer ride off, he turned to address Captain O'Donnell, and found to his surprise that Captain O'Donnell was gone. The chasseur, indeed, had not lingered a moment. With his straw hat pulled low over his eyes, he strode away at once through the town and to his quarters in the Silver Rose. The slouching, cockney-looking individual to whom he had spoken at the station was at the Silver Rose before him, and as the captain passed through the inn yard, sat on a bench in friendly converse with Lanty Lafferty.

"Dull?" Mr. Lafferty was repeating as his master passed through; "troth ye may say it's dull wid sorra sowl to spake to maybe from mornin till night. But thin, on the other hand, there's the hoith o' aitin and dhrinkin goin on late an' airly, and niver a han's turn to do half yer time, not to spake ov the barmaid an' the cook, two as purty an as pleasant-spoken crathurs as ye'd wish to kiss. It's a comfortable life entirely it would be av the town was only Ballynahaggart instead of Cas-

tleford. But arrah! shure we can't have iverything. By the hokey, here's the masther himself, long life to him."

"All right, Lanty," his master responded, passing through with a nod, and taking no notice of Lanty's companion. "How are they all at the Park? Seen Miss Rose lately?"

"I was at the Park above this morning, Misther Redmond, and I saw her ladyship, the lord's daughter, an' she was axin for yer honor, and bid me tell you the young misthress was over an' above well."

O'Donnell merely nodded again and hurried on. It was a very long time since his sister *had* been "over and above well," and he could see plainly enough it was more a mind than a body diseased; and that this Gaston Dantree—the scoundrel who had wrecked another noble life—was in some way the cause, he knew now, thanks to Miss Herncastle. But that he was or had been Rose's actual husband, had never for an instant occurred to him.

Lanty Lafferty resumed his occupation of brushing a pair of his master's tops, and his conversation with the stranger from London, interlarding work and social converse with a little music. His rollicking Irish voice came through the open windows to his master's ears:

> "'It was on a windy night, about two o'clock in the morning,
> An Irish lad so tight, all—'

Bad scran to ye fur tops, shure the art o'man wouldn't git ye the color he loikes!

> "'An Irish lad so tight—'

Oh, thin, divil fear him but he was tight—shure it's a wakeness all his counthrymen have. It's meself wud like a dhrop av potheen this minute, fresh from the still—me very heart's broke a drinkin' the beer they have in these parts, an' me gettin that fat in it, that sorra a waistcoat I have in the worruld that'll button on me good or bad. Oh, blissed hour! will I iver see the day whin all his sodgerin' an' his diviltry in Algiers, and Ameriky, and England will be over, an' meself back in O'Donnell Castle on the ould sod once more? Talk about grandeur—about yer Windsor Castles, an' yer St. James' Palace—be me word, the two av thim thegither couldn't hould a candle to Castle O'Donnell. Sixty-three rooms—sorra less—a stable full of cattle—the best blood in the country, a pack o' hounds, a butler in silk stockings, an' futmin as high as Fin McCoul,

the Irish giant, if iver ye heerd av him. Whiskey galore, champagne for the axin', an' waitin' maids that it ud make yer mouth water only to look at. It's little I thought, six years ago, whin I left sich a place as that, that it's an English inn I'd come to. It's thim wor the blessed times all out."

"Blessed times, upon my life," responded his listener, smoking philosophically. "I say, Mr. Lafferty, there's yer master a calling of yer."

Lanty seized the boots and made a rush for his master's room. The soft, silvery gray of the summer evening was falling by this time, and with his back to the faint light, the chasseur sat when his man entered.

"Come in, Lanty, and shut the door—perhaps you had better turn the key. I see you have made the acquaintance of that fellow in the inn yard already."

"Jist passin' the time o' day, yer honor. They're civil crathurs thim English chaps mostly, an' shure I'm not proud."

"I'm glad to hear it, and it is just as well your pride has not stood in the way of your sociability on the present occasion, as you would have to make his acquaintance whether or no. Lanty, can you keep a secret?"

"A saycret is it? Upon me conscience thin that same's a question I didn't expect from yer father's son. A saycret! Arrah, Misther Redmond, is there a bad turn ye iver did since ye were breeched that I don't know? Is there a bit av divilment ye iver wor in (an' faith yer divilment was past countin') that I didn't know betther than me prayers, and did I iver tell —did I now? Faith it's late in the day, so it is, to ax me sich a question as that."

"Well, Lanty, don't be indignant—of course, I know you can. Then I want you to keep quiet this evening, and perfectly sober, remember; to retire to your room early, but not to go to bed. About half-past eleven, when the town is quiet and every soul in the inn gone to sleep, take your shoes in your hand, steal out as though you were a mouse, and wait for me under the clump of larches beyond the inn. You'll find your London acquaintance there before you—I brought him down, and I want you both to-night. Lanty, did you ever hear of a resurrectionist—a sack-'em-up?"

"Sorra hear. Is it anything to ait or dhrink?"

"Nothing to eat or drink. A resurrectionist is one who opens graves, steals dead bodies and sells them to medical students for dissection"

"The Lord betune us and harm!"

"And this fellow you have been talking to all the evening is a professional sack-'em-up." The chasseur's gravity nearly gave way at Lanty's look of horror. "Never mind, my good fellow, he won't sell you for dissection; and, as I said before, you must be civil to him despite his profession, for I have brought him down on purpose to open a grave this very night, and you are to come along and help."

"Open a grave! Oh, king o' glory!"

"It's all on the square, Lanty—no stealing dead bodies, no selling to doctors—I haven't quite got to *that* yet. But I have reason to believe a very great fraud has been perpetrated, and that very great mischief may come of it. To prevent that mischief I open this grave, open the coffin, see what it contains, and replace it exactly as I find it before morning. You understand?"

Understand. Mr. Lafferty was staring at his master with an expression of blank horror and consternation. Open a grave in the dead of night to see what a coffin contained. All the "divilment" of the past paled into insignificance beside this crowning act. Was his master suddenly going mad?

"I can't explain any further, and it is not necessary for you to know. Be on hand, as I said: keep sober, make no noise, and let me find you with Joggins under the larches at half-past eleven. They keep early hours here—all will be still by that time. Now go, and mind, not a word of this to a soul."

Lanty Lafferty went—his mouth had fallen open, and he forgot to shut it, his eyes were like full moons, that blank expression of consternation still rigid on his face.

"Open a grave! Oh, wirra! Afther twelve o'clock! The Lord look down on me this night! To see what's in a coffin! Arrah! is it taken lave av his sinsis intirely he is! Faith it's little rhyme or raison there iver was wid him or wan av his name, but av this disi'nt bang Bannagher! Bannagher! upon me sowl it bangs the divil."

But to rebel, to disobey, Mr. Lafferty did not dream. Had his master informed him it was his painful duty to murder some one, and he (Lanty) was to assist at the sacrifice, that faithful henchman might have groaned under the awful duty assigned him, but he would have obeyed. And he would obey now, although a legion of ghosts should rise in their winding-sheets to warn them from their dreadful deed.

The evening gray deepened into dark. Ten came—the stars

were out, but there was no moon. Captain O'Donnell sat at his open window and smoked. To him this last act was but an act of simple duty to save his friend—the one last proof needed in the strange discovery he had made. No harm should be done—the coffin would be opened, and replaced precisely as he had found it, the grave re-closed. And then Miss Herncastle should hear all—should confess to the man she had made love her the whole truth, or he would.

At half-past ten the inn was already dark and closed up for the night; there were but few guests, and these few kept primitive hours. At eleven not a light was to be seen. Still O'Donnell sat at his window, looking out at the dim starlight, smoking and waiting. Half-past eleven, and punctual to the moment, he saw Lanty stride across the inn yard and disappear in the shadow of the larches. The time had come. He had removed his own boots, and with them in his hand, made his way out of the room, down the stairs, and through the door Lanty had noiselessly unbolted. Not a creature was to be seen—the whole town seemed to be still and dark. He seated himself on a bench and drew on his boots, then he made his way at once to the place of tryst.

Lanty was at his post—upright as a ramrod, silent as a tomb, and giving his companion a wide berth—Mr. Joggins, with a sack over his shoulders containing spade and pick, and instruments for opening the coffin—spoke as he drew near.

"Here we are, noble captain—up to time, and not a minute to be lost. Lead the way, and we follers and gets to business at once."

Keeping all in the shade of hedges and wayside trees, with an uncomfortable feeling in spite of his consciousness of duty, that this night's work was an underhand and dastardly thing, the chasseur led the way. One belated pedestrian—one doctor's gig they met, no more, and the trees screened them even from them. They walked so rapidly that they were in the churchyard before the Castleford steeples tolled twelve. As the first sonorous boom of the midnight hour tolled out, Lanty Lafferty crossed himself devoutly, and looked fearfully at the white tombstones gleaming in the ghostly light.

Redmond O'Donnell strode steadfastly along between the rows of graves, the lonely paths, until under its solitary tree he paused at Katherine Dangerfield's. His lips were set, his eyes stern—for good or ill he would know the truth soon.

"This is the grave," he said, curtly. "Go to work; I'll keep watch."

The resurrectionist opened his bag, produced his shovels, gave one into the reluctant hands of Lanty, and set to work with professional rapidity and dexterity. The two men worked with a will until the perspiration stood in great drops on their faces. O'Donnell had brought a brandy flask, and gave them copious libations, until even Lanty's drooping spirits arose. No sound but the subdued noise of the shovelling clay—nothing living or dead to be seen. O'Donnell worked with them—there was no need of watching—and at last, far below in the faint light of the stars, the coffin lay revealed.

The men lay on their spades, wiped their faces, and drew a long breath. Then the resurrectionist and Lanty raised the coffin between them—the damp clay clinging to it, making it weighty—and placed it at Redmond O'Donnell's feet.

At last! He drew one long, hard, tense breath—his eyes gleamed. "Open it," he said, in a composed sort of voice, and Mr. Joggins produced his screw-driver, and set to work once more. The screws, one by one, were removed—the last lay in the palm of Joggins' hand—nothing remained but to lift the lid and see either the mouldering remains of Katherine Dangerfield, or—

He made a sign, Joggins raised it, all three bent forward to look. There was a simultaneous exclamation from all as they bent again to reassure themselves. The late rising moon, which had been struggling through the mists of coming morning, shone suddenly for a moment full upon the ghastly object before them, and lit it brightly up.

They saw what Redmond O'Donnell had expected to see—

AN EMPTY COFFIN.

---

## CHAPTER XXI.

### "THE LENGTH OF HIS TETHER."

THAT fateful July night, destined to be marked forever in the calendars of Lady Dangerfield and Captain Redmond O'Donnell, was fated likewise to be marked with a red cross in that of Sir Arthur Tregenna.

"Sir Arthur Tregenna has run the length of his tether," Lord

Ruysland had calmly said to himself while pacing the Castleford station; "it is high time to pull him short up."

For Lord Ruysland to decree was to act. This very night Sir Arthur should receive his "short pull up."

He waited placidly where he was; he saw Major Franklan' returr, still gloomy and in the sulks, saw him depart an hour later by the Parliamentary train, and not until then did he summon the fly, and give the order to Scarswood Park. There was no hurry, the young baronet was with the Park party at Morecambe; they were to return to dinner, not sooner. He was going to play his last great stake to-night. If he failed, his whole future might be told in one brief, forcible word—*ruin;* but not one pulse beat quicker, not one sign of agitation or eagerness marred the serenity of his handsome patrician face. As coolly, as deliberately as he had pronounced sentence of doom upon young O'Donnell six years ago, he was going to bring Sir Arthur to his bearings to-night.

The archery party returned; separated for a brief space, and met again at dinner. My lady was seized with that distressing headache, and disappeared immediately after, Miss Herncastle in her wake. Sir Peter in a few minutes followed suit. Miss O'Donnell, looking pale and fagged, made her excuses and sought her room. Lady Cecil insisted upon accompanying her. Squire Talbot cut short his visit and moodily departed. Lord Ruysland and Sir Arthur were left alone before it was quite half-past nine. Fate seemed inclined to take sides with the peer. Two minutes after Talbot's departure he opened the duel, and fired the first shot.

"What is this about a letter from Cornwall and your departure to-morrow, Sir Arthur? I heard you telling Lady Dangerfield at dinner, but did not quite catch your drift. Business, I suppose?"

"Yes, business—business too long deferred. Pennwalder wrote me a week ago urging me to return. There's a fever among my people, there have been mining accidents and much distress. It is greatly to my discredit that I have neglected my duty so long."

"Humph! then you positively leave us to-morrow?"

"I positively leave to-morrow. I wish I had gone last week."

He said it moodily, drumming with his fingers on the table, and not looking at his companion.

"So do I," Lord Ruysland spoke gravely, and with unwonted

energy; "so do I with all my soul. For the last week Scarswood has been no place for you."

"My lord!"

"It is high time for me to speak—a false delicacy has restrained me too long. I would indeed prove unworthy the dying trust of my dearest, my truest, my best friend, your dead father, if I held my peace longer. To-night I will speak, be the consequences what they may—to-night I will do my duty, however distasteful that duty may be. Long before your return to this house, if return you are mad enough to do, I and Cecil will have gone, and it is neither my wish nor my intention that we three shall ever meet again. My daughter's health demands change—she is falling into low spirits—I will take her to Scotland to the Countess of Strathearn's for the winter. I merely mention this that you may make your farewells to her final when you part to-morrow."

A flush rose up over the blonde face of the Cornishman, a deep permanent flush; his lips compressed, his eyes did not leave the table. Guilt, shame, contrition were in his countenance, and guilt held him silent. Let Lord Ruysland say what he might, he could not say one word more than he deserved.

"I see I do not take you by surprise," his lordship coldly went on; "I see you are prepared for what I would say. How bitterly I have been disappointed in you—of all I had expected from your father's son—of—I may say it now on the eve of parting forever—of the plans I had formed—of the hopes I had cherished—it would be idle to speak to-night. Hopes and plans are all at an end—your father's dying wish binds *me* no longer since you have been the first to disregard it. But still for your father's sake I will speak. On his death-bed he asked me to stand in his place toward you. Hitherto I have striven to do so—hitherto I have held you as my own son—all that too is changed. You have deliberately chosen to become infatuated with a woman of whom you know nothing—except that she is your inferior in station—deliberately chosen to throw us all over, and fall in love with a designing adventuress."

That deep, angry red still burned on the baronet's face, his lips were still resolutely compressed, his eyes still fixed upon the table. At the last words, however, he suddenly looked up.

"Designing adventuress!" he repeated, slowly. "You use strong words, Lord Ruysland. Of course you do not make such a statement as that upon mere suspicion."

"I do not I condemn no one upon mere suspicion. That

I suspect Miss Herncastle of some deep, mischievous, latent object in coming here, is true; that I suspect her of maliciously working upon that poor little superstitious fool, Sir Peter, and his fears, and of playing ghost for his benefit, is also true. But let that go—it has nothing to do with you, and for your sake simply I speak. You have haunted Miss Herncastle like her very shadow from the moment you met her first—for her you have pointedly, almost rudely, I had said, neglected and overlooked all others. There was but one way for this to end with a man of your high sense of honor—in marriage. Before that disastrous consummation is reached I lay a few plain facts before you. Afterward you will do as you please."

He took from his pocket-book a little packet of papers, and spread two of them out upon the table.

"Be kind enough to glance over these, Sir Arthur. They are the testimonials of character, and the references given by Miss Herncastle in London to Lady Dangerfield."

Still dead silent, the young Cornishman took them. The testimonials were carefully worded, the references were to a Mrs. Lawton of Wilton Crescent, and a Jonas Woodwidge, esquire, of St. John's Wood. He read and pushed them back.

"Well," he said, in a compressed voice.

"Read this also." The earl pushed another letter across to him. "I wrote that, as you see, to my solicitor, asking him to call upon Mrs. Lawton. You have read it. Now read his answer."

He pushed a third letter across. For the third time the baronet read.

"LINCOLN INN, LONDON, July 29th.

"MY LORD:—In compliance with your demand I called at Wilton Crescent at the number given. No Mrs. Lawton lived there, or had ever lived there. I next called at St. John's Wood; a Mr. Jonas Woodwidge *had* resided there about a year ago, but has emigrated with his whole family to Australia. This is all the information I have been able to obtain.

"I am, my lord, etc."

Sir Arthur laid down the letter. The flush had faded from his face, leaving him very pale.

"It is plain to be seen by any one not willfully blind, that the references are forged, by Miss Herncastle, of course, for her own ends. If Lady Dangerfield had taken the trouble to seek them and find this out for herself, no doubt her very clever governess would have been prepared with some plausible story to account for it. This much I must certainly say for Miss

Herncastle—she is one of the very cleverest women I ever met. Do you need farther proof that she is a designing adventuress? Let me tell you what my own eyes have seen—sufficient in itself to cure you of your folly, if this sort of folly is ever to be cured."

He leaned back in his chair looking sternly at Sir Arthur sitting like a culprit in the dock before him, and went on.

"It was the very night before Sir Peter saw the ghost under the King's Oak, of which more anon. It was a hot night, brilliant moonlight, and it is a failing of mine that I can never sleep well on very bright moonlight nights. It was past eleven when I went up to my room. I knew it was useless to go to bed, so instead I sat down to write half a dozen letters. It was half-past twelve when I finished the last—I lit a cigar and sat down by the open window to smoke myself into sleepiness if I could. The stable clock struck one, still I felt no inclination toward drowsiness. While I still sat there, to my surprise, I saw, at that hour, a woman and man crossing the fields and approaching Scarswood. If you have noticed, and beyond doubt you have, Miss Herncastle possesses a very stately walk—a very commanding figure. I knew her instantly—I also, after a moment or two, recognized the man. Of him, however, it is needless to speak. He accompanied her to the very house; they parted almost directly under my window. I heard him promise not to *betray her*. She appeared to be absolutely in his power. When he left her she stood and watched him out of sight. All this was nearly about two in the morning, mind, when everybody supposed the governess to be in bed and asleep. How she got in I don't know. She came down the next morning, looking as self-possessed and inscrutable as ever. My suspicions were aroused, and I watched again the following night. Sir Arthur Tregenna, as surely as I tell you, I saw her steal softly under my window, a few minutes before midnight, and take her post under the King's Oak. The gallop of Sir Peter's horse could be distinctly heard on the road. She wore a long dark mantle, and as he rode up the avenue I saw her fling it off and stand before him all in white—her hair flowing, her eyes fixed. What followed you know. She picked up her cloak and made her way back—how, Heaven knows. I tell you the simple truth—to-morrow I shall tell it to all the house—to-morrow Miss Herncastle quits Scarswood, and forever. To-night I warn *you*, Arthur, my lad—my son almost. Pause while it is yet time—give up this miserable designing woman.

and forever. Do not bring disgrace on your dead father—on your honored name—and lifelong misery on yourself. Go to Cornwall—go abroad—do anything—anything, only see Miss Herncastle no more."

The earl's voice broke—grew actually husky in the intensity of his emotion—in the perfection of his—acting. And still Sir Arthur sat like a stone.

"It has been a bitter blow to me—a blow more bitter than I can say. But I have learned to bear many bitter things in my life—this is but one more keen disappointment added to the rest. It will be better perhaps that we do not meet to-morrow—let me say it now—good-by, and may Heaven bless you, Arthur."

He rose and grasped the young man's hand. Sir Arthur arose too—quite white now, and looked him full in the face.

"One moment, my lord—then good-by if you will. All you have said I have deserved—no one can feel how I have fallen from honor and manhood more than I. Whether it is still too late to repair my great fault must rest with you. What I have returned to England for—what I came to Scarswood for—you must surely know. I shame to speak it. It was to see and know Lady Cecil Clive, and if she could so far honor me, make her my wife. On the night I first met," he paused, and spoke the name with a sort of effort, "Miss Herncastle, I had followed the Lady Cecil into the boudoir to place my fate in her hands. Of the spell that seemed to seize me from that moment, you know only too well—it is a sort of madness that I suppose few escape. For a time I was blind—I saw no danger—lately my eyes have been opened to my own guilt. There is but one who can be my wife—whether or no I have wronged her too greatly to ask her, you may decide. If so, then I leave England the moment my Cornish business is settled—if not," he paused. "It shall be as you say, my lord." He folded his arms, very white, very stern, and awaited his answer.

The bound that battered old organ, the earl's heart, gave at the words! He was saved! But his immovable face remained as immovable as ever.

"You are but mortal, Arthur, and Miss Herncastle is a most attractive woman. Without possessing a single claim to beauty, she is a woman to fascinate men, where the perfect face of a goddess might fail. She is a Circe, whose power all must feel. It is not too late, I hope, I trust; and yet Cecil is very proud. If she can forgive and accept you, *I* can, with all my

heart. I shall not say good-by, then, but good night and *au revoir*."

He left him before Sir Arthur could speak—left him alone in the brightly lit, empty drawing-room. He stood irresolute, then turned and followed the earl from the room.

Now was the time—now or never; let him hear his fate at once. Something lay like a stone in his breast—the dark, beguiling face, the soft flute voice of Helen Herncastle was before his eyes, in his ears. Of all the women on earth she was the one woman he would have chosen for his wife, and Destiny had written that he must never look on her face again.

In passing the length of the drawing-room to the door, he had to go by the tiny boudoir, where, on the evening of the theatricals, he had followed Lady Cecil. The curtains were only partly drawn, and seated within, her hands folded listlessly in her lap, her eyes fixed on the dim starlight, he saw once more, as on that evening, the earl's daughter. As on that evening, he swept back the curtain, and stood, tall and dark, by her side.

Her half-uttered exclamation died away. Before she could speak one word he was saying what he had come to say—hurriedly—incoherently—his face all set and stern, looking as unlike a lover as can well be conceived. She drew a little away from him, her clasped hands tightened over one another. She sat perfectly still and listened—a sort of scorn for him—a sort of scorn for herself—an utter weariness of everything, the only feelings she was conscious of. She listened with steady patience to the end.

"He was unworthy of her—infinitely unworthy; he esteemed and admired her with all his heart; it had been his dying father's wish—he had *her* father's consent. Would Lady Cecil Clive do him the honor to become his wife?"

She looked up at the last words, flushing red in the darkness.

"My father's consent," she repeated slowly. "Sir Arthur, tell me the truth. My father has been talking to you to-night? He has—oh! how shall I say it—he has ordered you to follow me here and say this?"

"On my sacred honor, no. *I* have been talking to your father—asking his permission to address you. I have said before I am unworthy; if you refuse me I shall feel I am receiving the punishment I richly merit. If you accept me it will be the study of my life to make you happy."

He stood and waited for her answer. "His punishment," she repeated with inward scorn. "Ah, yes, Sir Arthur, my

refusal would be a punishment not over hard to bear. He asks me, hoping—yes, *hoping*—though he may not acknowledge it himself, that I will refuse, and I—I must say yes."

She must say yes—her whole future, her father's, depended on it. She could not brave his anger—she could not live this life forever—what would become of her if she refused?"

All at once Torryglen rose before her, and Redmond O'Donnell's face, bright, eager, loving. Yes, in those days he had loved her. He had changed—she was no more to him now than his cousin Ginevra, and while life lasted, she must love him. No time to shirk the truth now, she loved Redmond O'Donnell, and this man who stood beside her asking her to be his wife loved Helen Herncastle. What a miserable, travestied world it was, what wretched hypocrites and cheats they all were.

Why had she not been born a farmer's daughter to hold life with a wholesome, hearty interest, to love her husband and be loved in return?

"You do not answer," Sir Arthur said. "I have lost all hold on your respect and esteem, as I deserve. Lady Cecil, will you not speak at least, and let me hear my fate?"

"What is it you wish me to say?" she asked wearily, a touch of pain and impatience in her voice. "You ask me to be your wife, Sir Arthur Tregenna—you are a man of truth and honor—you have lost neither my respect nor my esteem. Tell me truly—*truly*—do you really wish me to say yes?"

"I really wish you to say yes. If you do not say it, then I leave England again in a month—for years—for life."

She drew her breath hard—she spoke with a sort of gasp.

"You will leave England! Then there is no one else you will marry if—"

"There is no one else I will marry if you refuse—no one."

He said it resolutely—a hard, metallic ring in his tone, his lips set almost to pain.

"There is no one else I will marry—if you refuse me I leave England. Once more, Lady Cecil, will you be my wife?"

"I—will be—your wife."

The words were spoken—her voice faltered—her face was steadily turned to the still moonlight. It was over. He took her hand and lifted it to his lips. How chill its touch, but scarcely so chill as the lips that touched it. Then it was drawn away and she stood up.

"I leave here for Cornwall, as you know, to be absent two—almost three weeks To-morrow, before I go, I shall speak to

Lord Ruysland. Whatever I have been in the past—this much, Lady Cecil, you may believe of me—that you will ever be first in my thoughts from this hour—that I will make you happy if the devotion of a life can do it."

"I believe you," she held out her hand of her own accord now, "and trust and honor you with all my heart. It is late, and I am tired. Good-night, Sir Arthur."

"Good-night, Lady Cecil."

She left him standing there and went up to her own room. What a farce it had all been—she half smiled as she thought of it, love-making without a word of love, a proposal of marriage without a spark of affection between them. They were like two puppets in a Marionette comedy playing at being in love. But it was all over—her father was saved—she would make a brilliant marriage after all. She had accepted him, and fulfilled her destiny. Her name was written in the Book of Fate—Lady Cecil Tregenna.

---

## CHAPTER XXII.

### AFTER THE MASQUERADE.

BY the first train on the morning following the discovery in the churchyard, Mr. Joggins, in a third-class car, went back to London. By the same early train in a first-class compartment, Captain Redmond O'Donnell went up to London also.

It was a murky, dismal morning—this morning of the first of August; a sky like drab paper, a sultry oppressiveness in the atmosphere. It would rain and thunder presently, and clear the air; pending the thunder and rain it required an absolute effort to breathe. Captain O'Donnell had the compartment all to himself, and ample time, as the express whirled him Londonward, to think. He sat back with folded arms and bent brows; Miss Herncastle's pale, set, cold face before him all the way. His last doubt had been removed—the Katherine Dangerfield of the past, the Helen Herncastle of the present, were one and the same. He knew as well as he ever knew after the whole truth—the whole, strange story. It had

not been death, that trance which had held her, but one of those mystic torpors which minds and bodies have fallen into often before—a cataleptic trance, so closely resembling its twin sister, death, as to deceive Dr. Graves But the eyes of love are not easily blinded; Henry Otis had guessed from the first, no doubt, what it was. Why he had not spoken—why he had let the matter go so far as to permit her to be buried, rather staggered the chasseur. Was it that he feared to find his opinion of her being still living ridiculed? or that by saving her from the horrible fate of being buried alive he wished to forge a claim upon her gratitude and love? One or the other it must have been—if the latter, he had certainly failed, or by this time she would have been his wife. And that same night—aided, no doubt—he had reopened the grave and taken the still inanimate form from its dreadful resting-place. He could see it all—the resurrectionist, the story trumped up for the servant next morning, the mysterious sick young lady, who was yet able to take midnight walks with the "master" in the garden—the brooding of that powerful mind—that strong intellect in the solitude of the lonely cottage. In that quiet upper room, no doubt, the whole plan of the future had been laid—the whole plot of vengeance woven. Perhaps, too, the narrow boundary line that separates madness from reason had been crossed, and much thinking had made her mad.

Then had come her flight—her exile to America—her theatrical success. Her object in this had probably been to make money to carry out her plans, and she had made it. She had returned—had worked her way into the family of Sir Peter Dangerfield—and for the past six weeks played her rôle of nursery governess. But where was her revenge? What had she gained? what had she accomplished beyond playing ghost, and frightening the little baronet nearly out of his senses? Was it worth while to take so much trouble for *that*, to risk so much to gain so little—or was it that some deeper, darker, deadlier plan of vengeance lay yet ahead? If so, then perhaps he was in time to frustrate it, and yet, in this moment there was more of admiration than any other feeling for Miss Herncastle uppermost in his mind. "Has your own fate been ordered so smoothly that you should be the first to hunt down to her ruin a poor wretch with whom life has gone hard?" The bitter pathos of her own words came back with a feeling almost like remorse. "With whom life had gone hard" indeed—who had been gifted with a great, generous, loyal, loving

heart, such as is rarely given to woman, a heart that had been broken, a nature that had been brutally crushed until it had become warped and wicked as he found it now. One of these women formed of the stuff that makes the Charlotte Cordays, Joans of Arc, or Lucretia Borgia as Fate will.

"Surely the saddest, strangest fate that ever befell woman has been hers," he mused; "ninety-nine out of a hundred would have sunk under it—died of a broken heart, a ruined life, or given up the battle years ago, and drifted into eternal obscurity. But Katherine Dangerfield is the hundredth who will fight to the bitter end. For Sir Peter it signifies little—he richly deserves all she is making him suffer—but Sir Arthur Tregenna and Lady Cecil Clive are quite another matter. *There* she must go no further. This last warning she shall have—Otis may have influence over her. If she defies it then Tregenna shall know all. The epitaph of Maria Theresa applies well to her, '*Sexa fœmina ingenio vie.*' 'A woman by sex, but a man in mind.'"

He entered a hansom on his arrival at the metropolis, and drove at once to the residence of Dr. Otis. It was a cosey cottage hanging to the outskirts of the genteel neighborhood of St. John's Wood, wherein the young Castleford practitioner had set up his household gods. At the entrance of the quiet street he dismissed the cab, opened the little garden gate, and knocked at the door. A neat maid-servant answered promptly.

"Was Mr. Otis at home?"

The neat maid shook her pink-ribboned head.

"No, sir, not at home—won't be at home until to-morrow—run down to the country for his 'elth. But if it's a patient," brightening suddenly.

"It's not a patient—it's business—important business. You don't appear to know, I suppose, what part of the country your master has gone to."

The pink ribbons shook again.

"No, sir—he often goes—the country he calls it—just that. But if it's himportant business, misses, *she's* in, and will see you, I dare say. What name shall I say sir?"

O'Donnell paused a moment. Mr. Otis had probably gone to Castleford to see Miss Herncastle, and no doubt *his* name was familiar to both mother and son by this time. If he sent in his card she might refuse to see him; he rather preferred to take her by surprise.

"Well, sir," the young person in the pink ribbons interposed, impatiently.

"Just tell your mistress a gentleman desires to see her for five minutes—I won't detain her longer."

The girl vanished—reappeared. "Misses will see you. Walk this way, sir, please," she announced, and the next moment he was ushered into the parlor and the presence of Mrs. Otis.

It was like the parlor of a doll's house, so diminutive, so spick-and-span, so glistening neat, and the little old lady with her pleasant, motherly face, her gray silk dress, her snow-white muslin cap and neckerchief, sitting placidly knitting, was in size and neatness a most perfect match for the room.

"You wanted to see me, sir." The knitting was suspended for a moment, as she looked curiously and admiringly up at the tall figure and handsome face of the Chasseur d'Afrique. "Pray come in and take a seat."

"Thanks, madame. It was your son I desired to see, but in his absence I have no doubt it will do equally well to say what I have come to say to you. Mr. Otis is in the country, your servant tells me—that means the town of Castleford, in Sussex, does it not?"

Her knitting dropped in her lap—the little old lady gave a gasp. He saw at once he had guessed the truth.

"I see I am right," he said, quietly. "I have come direct to-day from Castleford, Sussex, myself. On the occasion of your son's last visit to that place I believe I chanced to see him. It was in the cemetery; you recollect the little Methodist cemetery, no doubt—just outside the town and adjoining your former residence. Yes, I see you do. I saw him in the cemetery talking to a lady by appointment, I judge; rather an odd place, too, for a tryst, by the way. The lady was Miss Helen Herncastle. Do you know her, Mrs. Otis?"

Again Mrs. Otis gave a sort of gasp, her pleasant, rosy, motherly face growing quite white. There were no words needed here—her face answered every question. He felt a species of compunction for alarming her as he saw he was doing, but there was no help for it.

"You know Miss Herncastle?" he said, not without a smile at her evident terror; "and are interested in her welfare. Your son did her great service once, and is her nearest and most confidential friend still. It is of Miss Herncastle I have come to London to speak, knowing that you and Mr. Otis have her

welfare at heart. She must leave Scarswood, and at once, or else,—or else, painful as my duty may be, Sir Peter Dangerfield shall know the whole truth."

The knitting dropped on the floor—little Mrs. Otis rose to her feet pale and trembling.

"Who are you, sir?" she cried, in a sort of whisper. "Who are you?"

"My name is Redmond O'Donnell."

She uttered a low, terrified exclamation—then in frightened silence sank back into her chair. Yes, she recognized the name—had heard all about him, and now sat pale and trembling with nervous dread, looking at him with wild, scared eyes.

"I am very sorry to frighten and agitate you in this way, my dear Mrs. Otis," he said, speaking very gently, "and—if Miss Herncastle will listen to reason—there is really nothing to be frightened about. But one thing or other she must do—leave Scarswood or tell the truth."

"The truth?"

"That she is Katherine Dangerfield—not lying in Castleford churchyard, but alive and in the flesh. You see I know all—all."

She sat looking at him, pale, helpless, speechless with fear and amaze.

"I know all," O'Donnell repeated. "That what all took for death was merely a trance, and that your son alone knew it. Knowing it he allowed her to be buried, and that same night secretly had the coffin opened, and its living inmate removed. He restored her to life and consciousness. You kept her hid in your house. She passed for Miss Otis, and was never seen by any one but yourself and your son. At night, when all was asleep, she took her airing in your garden, and after remaining a fortnight, until perfectly restored, she ran away. She went to America—she became an actress, made money, and returned to England. She had sworn vengeance upon Sir Peter Dangerfield, and all these years had never faltered in her purpose. She made her way into his family as governess, and has nearly driven him out of the few senses he possesses, by playing ghost. It is a daring game she is carrying on. She is a bold woman, indeed. That Katherine Dangerfield and Helen Herncastle are one and the same, no one but myself knows or suspects. There is the grave where they saw her buried, the tombstone with its false inscription, to stagger them. I alone know—I KNOW, Mrs. Otis. Shall I tell you how? I have done

what your son did—I opened the grave—I opened the coffin, and found—it empty. No mouldering remains—no shroud—no ghastly skull and bones, and dust and ashes, but a clean and empty coffin. How I have discovered the rest does not matter. I know the whole truth. I am prepared to prove it. Whatever motive keeps Miss Herncastle at Scarswood, beyond that of terrifying its superstitious little master, I don't know, but it is a sinister motive, a revengeful motive—of that I am sure. And as they are my friends I cannot stand by and see it. Let Miss Herncastle go to Sir Peter—to Sir Arthur Tregenna—to Lord Ruysland or his daughter, and tell them her story, and *then* stay her lifetime, if she chooses, and they permit. If she will not, then I will tell all, and give Sir Peter a chance to defend himself from a foe so ready to stab in the dark. I might have said all this to herself, but she has looked upon me as her enemy from the first, and would set all warning of mine at defiance. Your son is her friend—let *him* speak and she may heed. I have no wish to be hard upon her—I pity her—I even admire her—she has suffered greatly; but nothing save evil can come of the course she is pursuing now. She must speak before this week ends, or leave Scarswood—that is my ultimatum."

He arose. "I see that I have distressed you, Mrs. Otis—alarmed you—and I regret having done so. There is no occasion for alarm, however. Miss Herncastle has only to drop her masquerade and come forward in her true character, and I am ready and willing to become her friend instead of her enemy. But I will *not* stand by and see this deception go on. I wish you good-afternoon."

He turned to go, but Mrs. Otis, in the same frightened sort of way, made a motion for him to remain.

"You—you take a good deal for granted," she said, in a gasping sort of voice. "I never admitted that I knew Miss Herncastle—that she is Katherine Dangerfield; and I think it was wicked of you, and sacrilegious, to dare to open her grave. She was hunted down in her life, poor girl, and it appears she cannot be left in peace even in her grave. I have heard of you before, Captain O'Donnell—of your watching, and following, and interfering where you have no business." She stopped as a smile broke over his face.

"From whom, madame? since you do not own to knowing Miss Herncastle. You are right, too—*I have* watched and followed. Fate seems to have taken a malicious pleasure in

pitting me against her. And as I find the rôle of amateur detective disagreeable enough in itself, I trust Miss Herncastle will not compel me to add that of informer to it. But if she persists, you may tell her from me, that I never shirk any duty, however personally unpleasant. Once more—good-day, madame—here is my card—my London address is on the back; I shall remain in town three or four days If Mr. Otis returns during that time, I shall be happy to see him."

And then the chasseur bowed himself out, and never had the new duty which so strangely devolved upon him of all mankind, been half so distasteful as when he took his last look at poor little trembling Mrs. Otis' distressed face.

"Confound the whole affair!" he thought, savagely; "I wish to Heaven I had never seen Scarswood, nor any one in it. What is Sir Peter Dangerfield to me? or Sir Arthur Tregenna either, for that matter, that I should fight their battles? Now that I have got into the thick of the fray it is impossible to get out without dishonor somewhere; I can't shut my eyes and see the one driven stark mad with his superstitious ghost-seeing, and the life-long misery of the other insured. I wish I might see this Henry Otis. Why can't Miss Herncastle marry him and settle down into a sensible commonplace matron?"

He waited impatiently during the four ensuing days, but he waited in vain. If Mr. Henry Otis had returned to town, he did not call upon Captain O'Donnell; and disgusted and desperate, on the evening of the fifth he returned once more to Castleford.

He presented himself at Scarswood at once. He had not seen his sister for a week. It was close upon eight o'clock, and the silver gray of the summer evening was deepening into twilight, as he walked up the avenue. The flutter of a white dress caught his eye amid the dark-green depths of fern; a tall, slender shape, with bright, hazel hair, was slowly pacing the terrace alone. It was Lady Cecil. A soft mass of rose-pink cashmere, silk, and down, wrapped her. She held a letter in her hand which she read as she walked. And even in that "dim religious light" O'Donnell saw, or fancied, that the fair pale face had grown paler and graver than ever he had seen it, in those five past days.

"Lady Cecil."

He lifted his hat and stood before her. She had not heard him until he spoke. A faint, tremulous flush rose up over the sensitive face as she turned and gave him her hand.

"Captain O'Donnell! and just as we all began to give you up for lost. I am glad you have come—I have been wishing for you unspeakably. Do you know that Rose is ill?"

"Lanty said something of it, but I thought—"

"She is really ill—something has happened—I don't know what, only that Miss Herncastle is at the bottom of that too. Your sister has worked herself into a fever—she has neither eaten nor slept, I believe, since you went away. Something is preying on her mind—something which Miss Herncastle alone knows. Oh, that dreadful Miss Herncastle! Why did she ever enter this house! Captain O'Donnell, we are in trouble—terrible trouble—and *she* is the cause of it all. Do you know that she is gone?"

"Gone!"

"Been dismissed—discharged—sent away in disgrace. It is the strangest thing—the most wickedly malicious; and whatever her object could have been puzzles us all."

"Lady Cecil, you puzzle me. What new enormity has Miss Herncastle been guilty of?"

"You do well to call it enormity. She has parted Sir Peter Dangerfield and his wife—for life, I greatly fear."

He had been walking by her side—he stopped and looked at her now. He had delayed too long—he had shown her his cards and let her win the game. He had thought to spare her, and the mischief was done.

"Parted Sir Peter and his wife! Do I hear you aright, my dear Lady Cecil?"

"It sounds incredible, does it not? Nevertheless, it is true. You remember the masquerade at Mrs. Everleigh's last Thursday—that most miserable masquerade? Ginevra would insist upon going with Major Frankland as the Page Kaled—he as the Knight Lara. Sir Peter hates Mrs. Everleigh—he abhors masquerades and male costumes for women. Of course, he was right and Ginevra was wrong, but his very opposition made her more resolute to go. He told her if she went she should never return, that she should not live under his roof and disgrace it. Ginevra defied him; but in her heart, she owns now, she was afraid, and ready to draw back. But that fatal Miss Herncastle would not let her. She had suggested the costumes, made Ginevra's, and used every persuasion to induce her to defy Sir Peter—deceive him rather, and go. Ginevra yielded. She wrote a note at the dictation of the governess, to Major Frankland, in London, telling him of Sir Peter's opposition, asking

him to come secretly down, remain at one of the inns, and go from thence to the ball. My poor cousin cannot even keep her own secrets, and she told me. I said everything I could think of to shake her resolution, but in vain. Finally I told papa in despair, and made him waylay the train at the station. You remember—he met *you* that same afternoon. He talked to Major Frankland, and the major finally agreed to give up the ball Ginevra, of course, would not dream of going without him But he insisted upon seeing her, and telling her with his own lips. Unfortunately we were all at Morecambe at an archery party, and when he reached Scarswood he found only Miss Herncastle. He wrote a note explaining all; told her to have his masquerade dress returned, and left her. That note Miss Herncastle destroyed—she owns it; and, Captain O'Donnell —it seems almost incredible—*she* went to the masquerade instead of Major Frankland and in his dress! The major is short, the governess is tall—she managed to make the Lara costume fit her. No one ever heard of such a thing before. You will scarcely be able to believe it."

"I can believe a great deal of Miss Herncastle. She is a wonderful woman!"

"A wonderful woman, indeed—it is to be hoped there are few like her," Lady Cecil responded indignantly; "and yet, though something seemed to warn me against her—she had a sort of fascination for me from the first. Well, Captain O'Donnell, it happened in this way: We returned from the archery fête; Ginevra pretended headache and retired to her room. All the while Sir Peter was on the watch. Miss Herncastle dressed her—a flyman from Castleford was in waiting, and he took her to Mrs. Everleigh. The governess had managed to secrete the Lara dress in her room, and the moment Lady Dangerfield was gone, she rapidly dressed herself, and walked—actually walked from Scarswood to Mrs. Everleigh's house. Sir Peter, in spite of their precautions, had seen his wife depart, and followed immediately. At Mrs. Everleigh's he procured a black domino, and in that disguise, and masked, of course, he watched the page. The knight arrived in due time—rather late, perhaps, and neither Ginevra, dancing or talking to him, or Sir Peter watching, deemed it was other than the major."

"Well," O'Donnell said, curtly.

"Supper came, and under plea of going for an ice, Count Lara disappeared. Ginevra had to go down on the arm of another gentleman. At supper there was the usual universal un-

masking, and the first face poor Ginevra saw was that of Sir Peter. Imagine her feelings! And the major nowhere to be seen. A moment after, Sir Peter disappeared, and my unfortunate cousin, half dead with fear, made her way from the supper-room and the house, and reached home in the fly, the most pitiable object you ever saw. Her first question was for her husband—her first impulse to throw herself at his feet and implore his forgiveness. But he was not here—he has not been here since."

"Not here since?"

"No, Captain O'Donnell. If he had come home and raged and stormed there might have been some hope—now I fear there is none. He is in Castleford, and his London solicitor is with him, stopping at the Scarswood Arms. He refuses to see his wife—he will never see her again, he says, as long as he lives. Papa has been with him—I have been with him—all in vain. He is harder than stone—harder than iron. She has made his life miserable long enough—that is his answer. If she were dying he would not see her now. He told her if she went to that woman's house—in male attire, to meet Jasper Frankland, she should never live beneath roof of his. And she never will."

"But it was not—"

"It was not Major Frankland. Yes—yes, he knows that; it makes no difference; nothing makes any difference. I believe he hates her and only wants a pretext for separation. This horrible masquerade and more horrible governess have given him that. He knows Jasper Frankland was in London, and that Miss Herncastle played the double part of Major and Lara on that fatal night. His answer is that *that* has nothing to do with it—his wife went in the full belief that it *was* Frankland, in male attire, and to the house of a woman of doubtful character. If there were grounds for divorce, a divorce he would have; as there are not, he will still have a separation. Lady Dangerfield may remain here until the necessary documents are drawn up—then she leaves, and forever. She is nearly insane, and no wonder; think of the exposure, the scandal, the disgrace. And to know—to know it is all that wicked, revengeful woman's work."

He had never seen her so moved, so excited, so agitated in her life. Was this the cause of the change he saw in her altered face?

"And how was it all discovered? Did Miss Herncastle confess at once?"

"Miss Herncastle has not confessed at all. In some way she reached Scarswood before Ginevra—she must have had a conveyance waiting, and was one of the first to receive her in her ordinary dress. The tumult poor Ginevra made aroused the house. In the cold gray of the morning we all—papa among the rest—gathered about her. She told her story in an incoherent way. Papa listened in amazement. 'Frankland,' he said. 'Frankland at the ball!—impossible! I myself saw him depart for London by the Parliamentary train at 6.20 last evening. Frankland is in London.' He was positive, Ginevra was positive. The end of the matter was he telegraphed to Major Frankland in London—*was* he there or had he been at the ball! The answer came at once—he had *not* been at the ball, was then in London, and would run down at once. He did so, and then the murder was out. 'Had she not got his note?' 'What note?' 'The explanatory note given to Miss Herncastle.' 'Certainly not.' Miss Herncastle was summoned and confronted with the indignant major. 'What had she done with his note?' And Miss Herncastle looked him full in the face, and told him she had destroyed it."

"Did she say why?"

"She said (and you should have heard how coolly) that she thought it a pity Lady Dangerfield should be deprived of the ball, and of wearing the dress upon which she had set her heart, for a jealous whim of Sir Peter's and a prudish whim of the major's. She destroyed the note, and allowed Lady Dangerfield to go and enjoy herself. Who then had personated the major—herself? But on this subject Miss Herncastle was mute—as obstinate as Sir Peter himself. The Lara dress was found packed in its box in the major's room, and the governess refused to confess or deny anything. They might suspect what they chose—accuse her of anything they liked. If they could not prove their charges they had better be silent—she would admit nothing. And she would not. Ginevra flew into a terrible passion and ordered her out of the house, and she went—without a word."

O'Donnell drew a long breath.

"By George!" he said, "here is a mare's nest. And where has she gone, Lady Cecil?"

"To London—three days ago. Before she left, she had an interview with your sister, since when Rose has been unable

to leave her room. And Ginevra is in hysterics in *hers*. I never saw papa so worried—so annoyed in all my life before. He says Miss Herncastle is Satan himself in crinoline, and that all her mischief is not done yet."

"I agree with his lordship. And her champion—her admirer of other days, the chivalrous Cornishman—where is he that he does not break a lance in favor of this persecuted lady?"

The soft summer dusk might have hidden from any other than the keen blue eyes of O'Donnell, the flush that rose up all over Lady Cecil's fair face.

"It is hardly a fitting time or subject for Captain O'Donnell's sarcasm," she answered coldly. "Sir Arthur Tregenna is in Cornwall. He left very early on the morning following the masquerade—before the news had spread."

"I beg your pardon, Lady Cecil—believe me I sympathize with *you* at least. Will you pardon me again, if I say I feel but very little for Lady Dangerfield. Her own disobedience has wrought her ruin—she has no one to blame but herself."

"That does not make it any easier to bear. But I know of old how little sympathy you have for human error. She may have done wrong, but she is suffering now, and suffering goes far to atone for sin."

She had grown white again—her face looked like marble in the faint misty light. She was looking away from him as she spoke, a wistfulness, a passion in her brown eyes he could not understand.

"I dare say people who go through life as *you* have gone, neither loving nor hating very greatly, can afford to be cynical, and hard, and cold. You have never suffered yourself—nor erred, I suppose—how are you to understand or feel for your weaker fellow-mortals who do? But at least I hope you will be able to descend from your tower of strength far enough to sympathize with your sister. Be gentle with her, Captain O'Donnell—at least as far as you understand the word, for she is in trouble. Don't be too hard—your life is not all over—even *you* may learn what it is to suffer, before you die!"

She turned from him, and was gone—the graceful willowy figure, the flashing hazel eyes. The passion in her voice—what did it mean? He watched her—an inexplicable look on his face—a hard sort of smile on his lips.

"Even *you* may learn what it is to suffer before you die." He repeated her words inwardly, as he took his way to his sister's room. "Ah, Lady Cecil, you taught me that lesson

thoroughly six years ago. I was a fool then—a fool now—and I fear the folly will go with me to my grave." He tapped at his sister's door. "It is I, Rose," his familiar voice said. "May I come in?"

He heard a stifled cry from within—a cry of terror it sounded, and his heart smote him. Poor little Rose! Had it come to this—had he been hard and unfeeling with her, and taught her to fear instead of love him? With the remorseful thought still in his mind, the door opened and she stood before him.

---

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### "SIX YEARS TOO LATE."

POOR little Rose, indeed! In the dusk she came gliding forward, so unlike herself—so like a spirit—so wan, so wasted—that with a shocked exclamation, he drew her to him, and looked down into her worn face.

"They told me you were ill, Rose, but not like this. If I had thought!—if I had known—"

She flung her arms round his neck, and hid her face on his shoulder.

"Don't, Redmond. Don't look—don't speak to me like that. I don't deserve it—I don't deserve any love or kindness from you. I have deceived you shamefully. You will despise me—you will hate me when I have told you all."

"Will I? I am not sure of that. When you have told me all, I think I shall still be sorry to see those hollow cheeks and sunken eyes, and wasted hands. Shall I light the lamps, Rose, or—"

"No, no! no lights; such a wretch as I am should tell her story in the dark. Here, sit down in this chair, Redmond, and let me take this stool at your feet. At your feet, my fitting place."

"My dear Rose, a most ominous beginning. What must the story be like when the preface is so terrible? Have you not grown nervous and hysterical, and inclined to magnify molehills into mountains? Out with it, Rose; I promise not to be

*too* stern a father confessor. It's the story, I suppose, about this fellow Dantree?"

She had seated herself at his feet, her arms across his knee, her face lying upon it. He laid his hand very gently on her bowed, humbled head.

"Speak, Rose. I am sorry to see you have learned to fear me like this. If I was stern with you the other night I ask you to forgive me now. If you and I may not trust each other, whom may we trust? I promise to be merciful. Is it about this fellow Dantree?"

"It is. Redmond, I ought to have told you that other night, but I am a coward—a weak, pitiful coward. They say a guilty conscience makes cowards of us all, and mine is a guilty conscience indeed. For seven years I have kept the secret I tell you to-night. Redmond," a great gasp, "you asked me if Gaston Dantree was my lover, and I said yes. I should have told you the truth; he was more than my lover. He was my—husband."

The last word seemed to suffocate her. She crouched farther down as though shrinking almost from a blow. She had expected a great start—an exclamation of amaze and horror—either as hard to bear as a blow. Neither came. Dead silence fell. He sat perfectly still—a dark statue in the dark. Whatever look his face wore, she could not see. That pause lasted for perhaps ten seconds—ten hours it seemed to her. Then, "Your husband! This *is* a surprise. And for seven years you have been this scoundrel's wife?"

"For seven long, miserable years. Oh, brother, forgive me. I have done shamefully wrong—I have been a living lie—I have deceived the kindest grandfather—the dearest brother, but if you knew what I have suffered—"

That choking in her voice made her pause again. "And suffering goes far to atone for sin." He remembered Lady Cecil's soft, sad words of reproach, and again his caressing touch fell upon the bowed young head. It had been a blow to him, a blow to his love and his pride, and both were great, but his voice and touch were far more tender than she had ever known them for years.

"I can believe it," he said; "you have atoned for your folly indeed. Don't fear, Rose. I can only regret that you did not tell me long ago. Tell me now at least—all."

She told him—in broken sentences—with bowed head, while the darkness of the August night deepened in the little room,

the old story of a girl's love and folly—of "marrying in haste and repenting at leisure."

"I wasn't quite eighteen, and just home from my convent school when I met him first, with all a girl's foolish dreams of beauty, and love, and romance. He was very handsome—I have never seen such a face as his—with the dash, and ease, and grace of a man of the world. And if he had been a very vulcan of ugliness, his divine voice might have won my dreaming, sentimental girl's heart. The aroma of conquest hung about him—married ladies petted and spoiled him—young ladies raved of his *beaux yeux* and his Mario voice, and I—I fell in love with him in a reckless, desperate sort of way, as later I suppose poor Katherine Dangerfield did in this very house. I was M. De Lansac's reputed heiress then, and just the sort of prize he was looking out for. Very young, very silly, not bad-looking, and the heiress of one or two million dollars—a prize even worthy his stooping to win. And—and Redmond, in these first days I think he even liked me a little too. My grandfather detested him—forbade him the house—forbade me to see or speak to him. Then began my wrong doing—I did see him—I *did* speak to him—I loved him—*you* wouldn't understand if I told you how dearly, and—and—Redmond—I consented to a private marriage. He was afraid to lose M. De Lansac's heiress, and I was afraid to lose *him*. He threatened to leave New Orleans and never return if I refused. I married him and for a little time was happy in a fool's Paradise. Only for a very little while indeed. My grandfather, in the most unexpected and sudden manner, as you know, got married. Gaston was furious—no need to tell you how he stormed and raved, or the names he called M. De Lansac. I received my first lesson in his real character then. That year he remained in New Orleans—then little Louis was born, and all his hopes were at an end. He might bid good-by to M. De Lansac's great fortune. He came to me one night—we met in secret in the grounds—like a man beside himself with rage and disappointment. He accused me of being the cause of all; it was bad enough to be a beggar himself without being deluded into marrying a beggar. He bade me savagely keep our marriage a dead secret from the world. He was going to England, he said; if he retrieved his fortune there some day he might send for me; if he did not, why I was still safe at Menadarva. That was our parting. I have never set eyes on him since.

"He went to England; he wrote me from London and gave

me a London address—some publishers there. I answered, but received no second letter. I waited and wrote again—still no reply. Then I got desperate, the little pride I had left me rose up. I wrote for the last time. If he wished to be free he was free as the wind; I would hold him or no man against his will. Only let him return my picture, and letters, and consider me as dead to him forever. I did not dream he would take me at my word, but he did; the next mail brought me what I asked, my letters, my picture, and not one word beside."

She paused, her breath coming in quick short sobs. Her voice was fainter than ever when she resumed.

"I was ill after that—ill in body and mind. A great loathing of New Orleans and all in it took possession of me—a loathing of life, for that matter. I wanted to die and make an end of all the miserable, never-ceasing pain that tortured me. As I could not die, I wanted to leave New Orleans, the scene of my troubles, forever. A great and indescribable longing to see Ireland once more—to see *you*—took possession of me. To add the finishing blow, I saw in an English paper the announcement of the approaching marriage of Miss Katherine Dangerfield, only daughter of Sir John Dangerfield, of Scarswood Park, Sussex, to Mr. Gaston Dantree, of New Orleans, with a few romantic details. I think I felt stunned, worn out. In a dim sort of way it struck me I ought to prevent this marriage. I looked in the paper again, determined, if possible, to save Miss Katherine Dangerfield, and dropped it in despair. The wedding day was fixed for the first of January; it was the twentieth then. It was too late. How was I to tell, that in New York or elsewhere, he might not have still a third wife, whose claim was prior to mine? I turned sick and cold with the thought.

"Redmond, I wonder I did not die. I *wanted* to die. I had such a horror of myself—of him—a horror too of ever being found out. But there was little danger of that; no one knew; my secret was safe enough. I wrote to you, but you had gone to Algiers. There was no hope but to remain, and drag out life at Menadarva. I still read the English papers for further news of him, and at last I read the cruel story—the horrible tragedy enacted in this house—the story of Katherine Dangerfield's wedding day, and what came after. She was happier than I. She died, and I could only live on and bear my trouble alone. I wrote to you again and again. A desperate longing to know whether Gaston were alive filled me. I didn't care for him—I abhorred him now, but I wanted to know. If he were dead, I

thought, and I were free, I would enter a convent, and find peace for the rest of my days. But I was years waiting before you came. You did come at last—you brought me here—here where he disappeared, and where I hoped to discover something more. But this man, Otis, in whose care he was, has gone. I know no more to-day than the day we came. This is my story, Redmond. Pity me, *forgive* me, if you can."

He had listened in grave silence—he had never interrupted her once. His hand rested still on her soft, dark hair.

"I pity you, I forgive you. It is easy to do both. And this is why you came to Castleford? If you had only told me—but it may not be too late yet. Trust me, Rose; I shall discover, and speedily, whether Dantree be living or dead.

She clasped her hands impassionately.

"If you only could. Oh, Redmond, how good you are—how good—how good! If you only knew what a relief it is to have told you this—to know that you do not hate me for what I have done. I dreaded *your* knowing more than anything else on earth—dreaded the loss of your love and trust. Even now, but for Miss Herncastle, I might still be dumb."

"Ah, Miss Herncastle. And she knows, of course she does. Pray what has this very remarkable Miss Herncastle to say on the subject?"

"She knew all, that I am Gaston Dantree's wife—*how* she knows it, she won't tell. She knows, too, whether he is living or dead, but she keeps her knowledge to herself. She told me she had little reason to love or serve my brother's sister—what did she mean by it? That you were very clever in the amateur detective line, and that here was opening for your genius. I couldn't understand her—I implored her to tell me the truth, but it was all in vain—she bade me go to you and tell you one good turn deserved another. Redmond, she is a mystery, a strange, desperate, dangerous woman."

"A mystery," her brother said. "Well, perhaps so, and yet a mystery I think I can understand. A dangerous woman. Well, perhaps so again, and yet a woman almost more sinned against than sinning. I pity *you*, Rose, but I pity Miss Herncastle more."

His sister looked up at him in wonder, but the darkness hid his face.

"You pity her," she repeated, "because she has been turned out of Scarswood?"

"Hardly. Never mind, Rose; you will hear it all soon enough, and when you do, I think you will look upon this designing governess, as I do, 'more in sorrow than in anger.' Let us drop Miss Herncastle and Gaston Dantree, too, for the present, and talk of yourself. You must understand, of course, that in the present state of domestic affairs at Scarswood, the sooner all guests leave, the better. Lord Ruysland and his daughter are Lady Dangerfield's relatives, and privileged to stay. For you—you must leave at once. Are you able to travel? You look wretchedly ill."

"Yes," she answered, wearily, "I think so. It is more a mind diseased than anything else. It is such an unutterable relief to have told you, and obtained your forgiveness and help, that I feel stronger already. You are right, we must go at once. Poor Lady Dangerfield. Oh, Redmond, brother, what a wretched, wrong-doing world it is!"

"Wrong-doing, indeed," and the chasseur's mouth grew sterner; "I have little compassion for Lady Dangerfield or any of her class. Place Miss Herncastle, the outcast, and Lady Dangerfield, the injured wife, in the balance, and let us see who will kick the beam. Can you pack to-morrow, Rose? I shall take you to France at once. Then, when you are safe with Madame Landeau, I shall return, begin my search for Dantree, and move heaven and earth until I find him."

She stooped and kissed his hand.

"I can be ready. I shall have only one farewell to make, and that is to Lady Cecil. I wonder if *she* is happy—you have heard *her* news, I suppose?"

He knew in an instant what it was—knew before the words were quite uttered. His voice—his grave, steady tones—had changed when he spoke.

"I have heard no news of Lady Cecil. What is it you mean?"

"I mean her engagement to Sir Arthur. He asked her to be his wife on the night of the masquerade, and she has consented. He departed for Cornwall early next morning. It was Lord Ruysland who told us, and somehow, Redmond, I don't think she is very much happier than the rest of us, after all. He is very wealthy, and it is the desire of her father's heart, but yet I think—"

Her brother rose abruptly.

"A great deal of nonsense, no doubt, Rose. You women never quite outgrow your sentimentality. Sir Arthur Tregenna

is a mate for a princess—she should certainly be happy It grows late, Rose, and you are not strong. You had better retire at once, and, by a good night's rest, prepare yourself for to-morrow's flitting. Good-night, my little sister—let us hope even your clouds may have their silver lining."

He stooped and touched his mustached lips to her pale cheek—then he was gone.

The house was very still as he passed out—a sort of awed hush, as though it were a house of death or mourning, reigned.

What a contrast to the brilliantly lit, brilliantly filled rooms of a week ago. "*Sic transit*," he said, as his masculine tread echoed along the vaulted hall; "life's a see-saw—up and down. And Lord Ruysland's daughter's engagement to Sir Arthur Tregenna is not a week old, after all! What of that little romance Lord Ruysland told me six years ago in Torryglen?"

"Ah, O'Donnell!" It was the débonnaire voice of Lord Ruysland himself that spoke. "Glad to see you again—glad to see any human being in this miserable house. I suppose you have heard all—devil of an affair altogether. May Old Nick fly away with Miss Herncastle. Who ever heard of such a proceeding before. Dressing herself up in Frankland's clothes, and deceiving even Ginevra! Gad! she's a wonderful woman! And what the dickens did she do it for? Out of pure, innate malevolence, and nothing else, I believe in my soul."

"But it has not been proven that it really *was* Miss Herncastle," O'Donnell said; "you all appear to have taken that for granted. She has not pleaded guilty, has she? and your evidence—conclusive though it may be, is purely circumstantial. She owns to nothing but having torn up the note."

"She owns to nothing certainly, but there is such a thing as moral certainty. It may not be evidence in a court of law, but it is quite sufficient to commit a culprit in the domestic tribunal. Miss Herncastle wore the knight's dress, and went to the ball, and has got Lady Dangerfield into a most infernal scrape. That is clear."

"Nothing is clear to *me* but that Lady Dangerfield has got herself into a scrape," O'Donnell answered with the stubborn justice that was part of his character. "Give the devil his due, Lord Ruysland. Miss Herncastle made the dress for Lady Dangerfield, but Miss Herncastle could not compel her to wear it to Mrs. Everleigh's masquerade against Sir Peter's

express commands. Miss Herncastle may have worn the major's dress and gone to the masquerade as Lara, but I doubt if seeing her there influenced Sir Peter one way or other. His wife disobeyed him—she went to Mrs. Everleigh's in male attire—defying his threats and the consequences. She is no child to be led by Miss Herncastle or any one else—she went with her eyes open, knowing her danger, and I must say—think what you please—that in Sir Peter's place I would do precisely what Sir Peter is doing."

"I don't doubt it," the earl responded dryly; "be good enough not to say so to Sir Peter, however, should you see him. He is sufficiently bitter without aiding or abetting."

"I am hardly likely to see him. My sister leaves Scarswood to-morrow—Castleford the day after. I will take her to France and place her in charge of a friend of ours there. Of course it is quite impossible now for her to remain here an hour longer than necessary. I am sorry for Lady Dangerfield—she has been most kind to Rose—most hospitable to me. I seriously trust this disagreeable affair may end amicably after all."

"Yes, I hope so," the earl answered coolly; "but I doubt it. It *is* hard on Lady Dangerfield—she may have her faults and her follies—who has not? But with them all, Ginevra was as jolly a little soul as ever lived. And it's a confounded bore for me, now that everything is settled—" and he stopped suddenly and looked askance at his companion.

"You allude to Lady Cecil's engagement, I presume," O'Donnell supplemented, quite calmly. "Rose has told me. My only surprise is, that it should be announced at this late day as news. I believe I am correct in thinking it a very old affair indeed—of six years' standing, or more."

Very few people ever had the good fortune to see Raoul, Earl of Ruysland, at a loss, but for one brief moment he *was* at a loss now.

"Very old affair—oh, yes, very—ever since his father's death—in fact, it has been tacitly—er—understood—nothing definite—aw—too young, of course, and all that sort of thing. It was the desire of the late Sir John, as well as myself, and—er—the young people were by no means averse to carrying out our wishes. All is happily settled now—the wedding will take place without any unnecessary delay. Are you going to Castleford at once? I should like half an hour's conversation with you about," he lowered his voice—"about Miss Herncastle; I have placed a detective on her track."

"My lord!" there was an unmistakable shock in the words.

"A detective on her track," repeated the earl. "Take my word, O'Donnell, that woman means mischief, and will do it yet. I'll forestall her if I can—I'll find out who she is and what brought her here, before I am many weeks older. I have already discovered—" He paused—the figure of a man was approaching them through the darkness. "Davis?" the earl said interrogatively, "is that you?"

"All right, my lord." The man pulled off his cap, halted, and looked keenly at O'Donnell.

"Go into the library, Davis—I'll follow and hear your report."

The man bowed obsequiously again, and went. Lord Ruysland turned to his companion.

"That's my detective; past-master of his business, keen as a ferret. I must go and hear his report—it will not detain me long. Then I'll tell you all, and I think you'll acknowledge Miss Herncastle is worth the watching. Wait for me in the drawing-room—Cecil's there, and will amuse you."

He left him and hurried away.

The chasseur stood irresolute for a moment—then, as if his determination was taken, turned and walked into the drawing-room.

He might have thought it deserted but for the low sound of singing that came forth. The lights were down—there was no one to be seen, but far off in the recess where the piano stood he caught a glimpse of a white dress and the gleam of a diamond star. Very softly, very sweetly she sang an old ballad that *he* had been wont to sing long ago in the little cottage parlor at Torryglen whilst her white fingers struck the accompaniment. He crossed over and leaned with folded arms against the instrument. She looked up at him with a smile and sang on:

"Oh, I loved in my youth a lady fair,
For her azure eyes and her golden hair.
Oh, truly, oh, truly, I loved her then,
And naught shall I ever so love again
Save my hawk, and my hound, and my red roan steed,
For they never failed in my hour of need."

She stopped and glanced up at him again. His eyes were fixed upon her, a steady, thoughtful, almost stern gaze. Again she smiled.

"How fierce the look this exile wears who's wont to be so gay Captain O'Donnell, what is it?"

The dark gravity of his face broke into an answering smile, still a grave one.

"'The treasured wrongs of six years back are in my heart to-day.' Lady Cecil, my sister and your father have told me all. To-morrow I leave Scarswood, the day after Castleford, in all likelihood forever. Before I go let me present my con gratulations to the future Lady Cecil Tregenna."

She turned suddenly away from him, her head drooped, a deep, painful, burning flush rose up to the very roots of her hair. As she sang the old song, as he stood beside her in the old way, the old, glad days had come back, the golden days of her first youth. Sir Arthur Tregenna and the present had faded for a moment as a dream, and Torryglen and her love, the only love she had ever known, had come back. And the spell was broken—*thus*.

She could not speak; the keenest pain, the sharpest pang she had ever felt caught at her heart like a hand. For that first instant even her pride forsook her.

"And I *can* congratulate you," the grave, deep tones of the soldier of fortune went on. "No truer gentleman, no more loyal friend exists, nor, in the future, I believe no more devoted husband than Sir Arthur Tregenna."

"Late—Miss Herncastle's slave and worshiper! Pray add that before you finish your panegyric, Captain O'Donnell."

She hated herself for the passionate words the moment they were spoken, for the bitterness of the tone, for the intolerable pain and jealousy that forced them from her. It was shameful enough, bitter enough, humiliating enough, surely, to know that she loved this man, as she *never* would love the man she was to marry—bad enough without being forced to listen to praises of her betrothed from him. A deep, angry red had risen in either pearly cheek, a deep, angry flame burned in either eye. His calm, friendly indifference, the cool gravity of his look and tone were more than she could bear.

"Miss Herncastle's slave," he repeated: "no, Lady Cecil; never quite that, I think. Her admirer, perhaps, if you like. Miss Herncastle happens to be one of those remarkable women whom almost all men admire."

"We won't split hairs over it. Sir Arthur is, as you say, an honorable gentleman; to that high sense of honor, no doubt, I am indebted for my present felicity. If he were free to choose, I fear you would hardly back my chances to win against those of Lady Dangerfield's late governess. I thank you for you

congratulations all the same, and accept them for exactly what they are worth."

She made a motion as though to end the subject, but the chasseur, still leaning against the piano, had no present idea of ending it.

"Miss Herncastle," he resumed coolly, "is, as I have often said before, a very extraordinary woman, and to be judged by no ordinary rules. Without any pretension to personal beauty, beyond a stately figure, a graceful walk, and a low sweet voice —that 'most excellent thing in woman'—she will yet fascinate where a merely beautiful woman may fail. She is one of those sorceresses whose fatal spell of fascination few may encounter and escape."

"And Captain O'Donnell is one of those fortunate few. But then, if Miss Herncastle be an extraordinary woman, Captain O'Donnell is a still more extraordinary man—extraordinary for his hardness, and coldness, and impenetrability if for nothing else. The spell of the enchantress has at least been powerless for *him*."

"Quite right, Lady Cecil. It has been powerless, perhaps, as you say, because I am naturally flinty, or because I have lain for years under another spell equally fatal, and the one has counteracted the other."

She laughed satirically, and began playing a waltz.

"*The beau chasseur* under a spell! Impossible to imagine such a thing. Who is the sorceress? Some Diamond of the Desert?—some Pearl of the Plains?—some lovely Araby's daughter? *Who?*"

"Shall I really tell you, Lady Cecil?"

"Just as you please," the white hands still played nimbly on. "Perhaps you had better not, though. Love stories are a trite subject—so old, so stupidly commonplace—they bore me to death, either in books or real life. And I don't think it is in your nature to have the disease very badly. I hope you admire my waltz—it is of my own composing. I call it the Rose Waltz, and dedicate it to Miss Rose O'Donnell."

"I like it, but I liked the song I heard you singing as I came in better—*my* song, Lady Cecil. Do you remember the last time I sang it standing beside you in the little parlor at Torryglen, as I stand now? You playing, and your father asleep in his arm-chair—or was he only pretending sleep, and watching us? The last time, Lady Cecil, though I did not know it."

She made no reply. She still played on the Rose Waltz, but she struck the chords at random.

"I remember it so well. You were dressed in white as you are now. White is your fitting color, Lady Cecil. You had wild roses in your hair, and we sang together all evening, and scarcely spoke a word. You have changed since then—grown taller, more womanly; more beautiful, and yet—will you be offended! I think I liked the 'Queenie' of Torryglen better than the *La Reine Blanche* of Scarswood."

"Captain O'Donnell's memory is good," she answered, as he paused, not looking at him; "better than I ever gave him credit for. I remember the evening he alludes to very well—the last, though *I* did not know it either. And will he be offended if I tell him I liked the Redmond O'Donnell who saved my life, who sang songs, and who was neither *blasé* nor cynical, much better than the dashing Chasseur d'Afrique of six years later? I fear time improves neither of us; I have grown worldly, you a cynic. What will we be ten years hence, I wonder?"

"I think I can answer. You will be Lady Cecil Tregenna, the fairest, the loveliest, the gentlest of England's stately matrons, the most loving of wives, the most tender of friends—'a perfect woman nobly planned.' I shall be—well, perhaps a Colonel of Chasseurs, the highest promotion I can hope for, with a complexion of burnt sienna—or—or else occupying six feet of Algerian soil. In either event I am most unlikely ever to meet *you* again; and so to-night, before we say our final farewell, I think, in spite of your dislike to love stories, I must tell you one. Not my own; you think me too hard for any such tenderness, and perhaps you are right. Let us say a friend of mine—an Irishman too—now an Algerian soldier like myself. Will it bore you very much to listen, Lady Cecil?"

"Go on," she said, faintly.

"It was—well, a number of years ago—when my friend was little better than a hobbledehoy of two-or-three-and-twenty, with a head full of romance and chivalry, an inflammable heart, and an empty purse. He had a long lineage, an old name, a ruined homestead, a suit of peasant's clothes, and nothing else. He lived alone—a dreamer's life, full of vague, splendid hopes for the future, and troubled with very little of that useful commodity—common-sense.

"One stormy autumn evening the romance of his life began. An English peer and his only daughter came to his neighbor-

hood to reside for a time, and it chanced that his good fortune enabled him to do the peer's daughter a service. They were very gracious, very grateful, and showed it in many kindly ways They overlooked the peasant's dress, the stupid bashfulness of my young friend, and invited him to their house, to their table ---he became the English girl's daily companion and friend. And his brain was turned. I told you he was a dreamer—he knew nothing of the world and its codes, was destitute of common-sense, and he fell madly in love with the earl's daughter, I shall not tell you how lovely she was at sixteen—one lady they say does not care to hear another praised. In those days I—my friend, I mean—was poetic, and two lines from one of his poets describes her:

> 'A lovely being, scarcely formed or molded,
> A rose with all its sweetest leaves yet folded.'

'A rose with all its sweetest leaves yet folded,' a pretty idea and a correct one. He fell in love with her—I have said she was sweet and gracious, gentle and kind—as a fair young queen might be to a peasant who had done her a service—too great not to be grateful. And he—he was a fool—he mistook it—mistook her. Will you believe it, Lady Cecil, when I tell you this enthusiastic young Irish idiot believed his passion returned, and actually deemed that for love of a raw mountain lad, without a farthing in his purse, she would wait until he had won name, and fame, and fortune, and become his wife. He smiles and wonders at his own inconceivable imbecility when he thinks of it now.

"I have one thing to say in his favor—he didn't tell *her*. When this foolish passion of his grew too great for one heart to bear, he went to her father and made his confession to him. I can imagine how this worldly wise peer—this ambitious English nobleman, laughed in his sleeve as he listened—it wasn't worth growing serious over, and in his way he rather liked the lad. He was wise enough not to laugh aloud however—if the young Irishman had been a duke he could not have entertained his mad proposal with more gravity and courtesy. His daughter had been engaged from her fourteenth year to a Cornish baronet of fabulous wealth, and was to marry him in a year or two at the most. Was it possible *she* had not told him? No, that was strange, certainly. However, her father could speak to her—if her heart inclined her to Irish love in a cottage instead of Cornish splendor, why—far be it from him to go between

'two souls with but a single thought, two hearts that beat as one,' etc. He was to go to-night—to come to-morrow and receive his answer from herself. Only, in the meantime—this last evening, he was not to broach directly, or indirectly, the tender subject to her, and to-morrow he was religiously to absent himself from their cottage all day. In short, the English peer dealt with a fool according to his folly.

"My friend has told me, as we lay and smoked, Lady Cecil, with the stars of Africa shining on our bivouac—that that evening stands out distinct from all other evenings in his life, and will, until his dying day. Every detail of the picture—the quiet, wax-lit room—the earl feigning sleep, the better to watch them, in his chair—the candles burning on the piano and illuminating her fair Madonna face—the cold, autumnal moonlight sleeping on the brown banks of heather without—the white dress she wore—the roses in her hair, gathered by *his* hand—the songs she sang—the sweet, tremulous, tender light all over the lovely face. It will remain with him—haunt him until his heart ceases to beat. They have met since then, but never again like that—young, fresh, trusting, and unspotted from the world.

"Next day came. They had parted without a word—he had passed a sleepless night, and at daybreak had ridden away—true to his promise in spirit as in letter. Evening came and brought him—for the answer he hoped, he believed would be *yes*. He had worked himself up into a fever of loving and longing, he flew down the valley to the casket that held his pearl of price. What do you think he found? A deserted house—an empty cage—the birds flown. Two notes were placed in his hand by a servant, who sneered at him as he gave them—two brief, cold, hard notes of farewell—that struck him more brutally than blows—one from her, one from her father. It was the old hackneyed, stereotyped form—she was sorry—did not dream that he cared for her—was engaged to another—it was better she should go, and she was always his friend, et cetera. It was written in her handwriting and signed with her name—her father's indorsed it.

"It was only what he richly deserved—you and I can see that—for his presumption, his madness—the only answer that *could* be given; but Lady Cecil, men have gone mad or died for less. In one night—from an enthusiastic boy—trusting all men—he became what you call me—a hard, cold skeptic, with no trust in man, no faith in woman, a cynic and a scoffer in a

night. He learnt his lesson well; years have gone, they have cured him of his folly, but it is a folly that has never been repeated, and never will to his dying day. Only—when they meet in after days, do you think *she* of all the women on earth should be the first to reproach him with his hardness, his coldness, his unbelief? She taught him his lesson—should she find fault if he is an apt pupil?"

He paused. His voice had not risen—in the low, grave tone she knew so well, he had told his story; an undertone of sadness and cynicism running through all. There was a half smile on his face as he looked at her and waited for his answer.

She started to her feet—the angry flush had long since left her face—she stood before him, pale to the lips—her brown eyes met his full.

"Captain O'Donnell, what story is this? Is it—is it—"

"My own, Lady Cecil! Yes; you hardly need ask the question, I think."

"Need I not? *Yours!* And what letter is this you talk of, written by my hand and signed with my name. I don't understand."

"You don't understand. A few minutes ago you accused *me* of a defective memory. But I suppose a matter of such trifling import could not be expected to remain in your memory. I mean the letter you wrote me, rejecting my presumptuous suit—telling me of your engagement to Sir Arthur Tregenna, the night before you left Torryglen."

"I never wrote any such letter."

"Lady Cecil!"

"I never wrote any such—"

She paused suddenly. Over her face there rose a flush, her hands clasped together—she looked at him, a sudden light breaking upon her.

"The note papa dictated, and which he made me write," she said in a sort of whisper. "Redmond, I see it all!"

The old name, the thrill his heart gave as he heard it. In the days that were gone it had been "Redmond" and "Queenie" always.

"It is my turn not to understand. Will you explain, Lady Cecil? I certainly read the note, written and signed by you."

"I know, I know." She sank back into her seat and shaded her eyes with her hand. "I see all now. Papa deceived us both."

In a broken voice, in brief words, she told him the story of that note.

"Papa told me nothing—nothing. I did not know, I never dreamed it was for you. And he hurried me away without a word of explanation or warning. I see it all now. And the hard things I have been thinking of you all these years, the hard things you must have thought of *me!* You who saved my life, Captain O'Donnell," with sudden passion, "what must you have thought of me?"

He smiled again.

"Very bitter things in the past, Queenie—in the long past. Of late years, as I grew in wisdom and in grace, I began to see your father acted as most fathers would have acted, and acted right. I don't mean to defend the duplicity of part of it, but at least he avoided a scene—no inconsiderable gain. All the wisdom of a Solomon and all the eloquence of a Demosthenes could not have made me see my folly in the proper light—the utter impossibility of my being ever any other than friend to Lord Ruysland's daughter. I would have persisted in falling at *your* feet, in pouring forth the tale of my madness, and succeeding in distressing you beyond measure. Your father foresaw all that, and forestalled it—he could scarcely have acted otherwise than as he did."

"And Captain O'Donnell, who might have been taken at his word by a girl of sixteen, as silly as himself, is only too thankful for his hair-breadth escape. I understand, sir—you don't know what good reason you have to thank Lord Ruysland's common-sense. I only wonder the matter having ended so well—for you—you care to allude to the subject at all."

"Only too thankful for my hair-breadth escape!" he repeated "Queenie, if I had spoken—if you had *known!*"

"But you did not," she interrupted, coldly, "so we will not discuss the question. You have escaped, that is enough for you. I am Sir Arthur Tregenna's affianced wife, that is enough for me. I ask again, why have you spoken at all?"

"Because I could not—hard, cold, inmovable as you think me —I *could not* part with you again—this time forever—without knowing whether or no you really wrote my death-warrant six years ago. It was so unlike you—it has rankled so bitterly all those years, and of late the truth began to dawn upon me. Perhaps because the old, sweet madness has never left me; and when we have parted—when you are a happy wife and I am back in Algiers—the happiness of knowing Queenie was all I

thought her—my little love, my true friend, and not even at sixteen a coquette, a trifler with men's hearts—will repay me for all I have lost."

He stopped abruptly. She had covered her face with both hands, and he could see the tears that fell thick and fast.

"Sir Arthur Tregenna is my friend," he said, his own voice broken. "Heaven knows I have no wish to say one word he may not hear, but, Queenie, I *must* speak to-night for the first —the last time. I have loved you—I do love you—I will love you while life lasts. If fate had willed it otherwise—if rank and fortune had been mine years ago, they would have been laid at your feet, where my heart has been all these years. Free or plighted, I know well how utterly, wildly impossible it would be for you to listen to me. It may be a dastardly deed to speak at all, but I must. You pity me, at least. Ah! Queenie, I would not have the past changed, with all its suffering, its loss, its misery, if I could. The thought of you is the sweetest thought of my life. If I have distressed you by speaking, I am sorry. Forgive me, Queenie, for this and all the rest."

Forgive! He asked no more. And in that instant, if he had said, "Come," she would have left rank and wealth, father and friends, and gone with him to beggary. But not for the crown of the world would he have said it. He loved her—but honor more.

"Let this be our farewell," he said, gently; "let our real parting be now. When we say it again it will be before the world. We will both be the happier, I hope, for understanding each other at last; you will think me no more a cynic and a scoffer—I will know you no more for a heartless coquette. Good-by, Queenie; may God bless you and make you happy!"

He held out his hand; she laid hers in it—the other hid her face. "Their hands clasped and the spirit kissed." "Good-by!" she heard him say again, holding her hand hard. Then he let it go, walked to the door, looked back once at the drooping figure, and was gone.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### A CHAPTER OF WONDERS.

AS he crossed the threshold of the drawing-room he encountered Soames, the tall footman.

"My lord's compliments, Captain O'Donnell," Mr. Soames said, bowing. "His lordship's in the library, captain, and requests you to wait upon him there."

O'Donnell nodded and walked forward to the library—his dark somber face betraying no more what had just passed than a handsome mask of bronze.

"Come in, O'Donnell," the earl said, in answer to his tap, and the chasseur entered the library, closed the door, and threw himself into a seat.

His lordship was alone—the lamps burned brightly, but even in their brilliance shadows lurked in the corners of the long, stately room. The curtains were drawn over the open windows, shutting out the dark, sultry summer night. On a table at the earl's elbow, wine-glasses and cigars stood.

"I suppose you're nearly out of patience by this time," his lordship began, "but Davis's report was unusually lengthy and interesting this evening; Davis's inclination for port wine was even more marked than usual. The lower orders, as a rule, if you observe, *have* a weakness for port wine, the thicker and sweeter the better. Davis is a clever fellow, and a skilled detective, but no exception to this rule. O'Donnell," he leaned forward and asked the question with most startling abruptness, "what do you know of Miss Herncastle?"

But the *sang froid* of O'Donnell was equal to his own—if he thought to throw him off his guard and read the truth in his confusion, he was mistaken. Captain O'Donnell, lying at full length back in his chair, pulling his long trooper mustache, looked across at him; the conscious calm of innocence in his surprised blue eyes.

"What do I know of Miss Herncastle? Well, not a great deal, perhaps, but enough to convince me she is a very fine woman, a remarkably fine woman, indeed, both mentally and physically. A little too clever, perhaps, as Lady Dangerfield seems to have found out to her cost."

"You won't tell me then. Very well, Davis and I must find out for ourselves. Only it would simplify matters if you would,

and I don't see why *you* should league yourself under Miss Herncastle's piratical black flag."

"Will your lordship think me very stupid if I say I really don't understand?"

"I would if I thought so, but I don't. O'Donnell, it's of no use your fencing me with the buttons on. You know more of Miss Herncastle than you choose to tell—I believe you met her before you met her here—in Algiers or in America. A man doesn't take midnight rambles, as a rule, with a lady who is a perfect stranger to him. Oh don't wear that unconscious look—it doesn't deceive me. I tell you I saw you escorting Miss Herncastle across the fields to this house between one and two in the morning."

"The deuce you did! And how came Lord Ruysland to be, like sister Anne, on the watch tower between one and two in the morning?"

"I was in my room. Have I told you before, I can never sleep well on bright moonlight nights. I was sitting at my open bedroom window. I saw you, sir. I even heard you. I heard you both."

"You did? May I ask—"

'I heard her ask you as you stopped if it were to be war to the knife between you, or words to that effect. You answered it should be as Miss Herncastle pleased. You left her as she stood, and she watched you out of sight almost—by gad! as if you had been her lover. And yet I hardly think you ever were that."

"Hardly. I played the lover once in my life, and received a lesson I am not likely to forget. Who should know that better than your lordship?"

His lordship winced. O'Donnell calmly took up a cigar and lit it.

"I suppose I may smoke while I listen. Nothing clears a man's intellect after dinner like a prime Manilla. Will your lordship go on—you look as though you may have seen something more."

"I have. I saw Miss Herncastle steal from her room the following night, waylay Sir Peter and play ghost. Come, O'Donnell, I am possessed of a burning curiosity concerning Miss Herncastle—make a clean breast of it—and tell me what you know."

"I can tell you all about the moonlight night you speak of, if that is what you mean. I remained later than usual at Scars

wood, and going home I saw Miss Herncastle taking a moonlight ramble, and presuming on my previous introduction, took the liberty of joining her. The moonlight may have affected her nerves as well as your lordship's; midnight constitutionals may agree with her, or she may have been paying a visit—this at least is certain, our meeting was purely accidental, and never occurred before nor since."

"And the mysterious words I heard under my window? Keep your secret and hers, if you will, but I warn you fairly I will find out for myself. Would you like to hear what I have discovered already?"

O'Donnell nodded in smoky silence—more interested than he cared to show. Had his lordship discovered the truth?

"Well," Lord Ruysland said, "from the night I saw her with you, and the night I saw her play ghost, my mind was made up. I had distrusted her from the very first—now I knew she was a dangerous woman. I wrote a letter on the quiet to a friend in London; my friend in London, still on the quiet, paid a visit to Scotland Yard, and sent down Davis, a dingy little man in rusty black, with weak eyes and a meek air, like a parson run to seed. He arrived on the very day of the grand dénouement—the day upon which Miss Herncastle was expelled from Scarswood. She had no friends or acquaintances in Castleford; she had announced her intention of returning to London. Davis and myself were on the platform when she appeared—a signal from me told him she was our game. From that moment she was safe; my share in the business was over. She took a second-class ticket for London—so did Davis. It was a Parliamentary, with no end of stoppages. What do you think Miss Herncastle did? Instead of going to London she got out at Treverton Station, nine miles distant, and deliberately walked back in this direction as far as the town of Lewes. It was quite dark when she reached Lewes, Davis still unseen on her track. She went to a remote little inn in the suburbs of the town called 'The Prince's Feathers,' and remained there all night. She gave no name, and wore a thick green veil over her face. Davis stopped at 'The Prince's Feathers' all night also. She remained in her room the whole of the ensuing day—it was nine o'clock before she ventured forth; and when she *did* venture out, still veiled, where do you think she went to? Have you ever heard of Bracken Hollow?"

Again O'Donnell nodded.

"Bracken Hollow is over three miles from this, and four

from Lewes, a tolerable walk, as poor Davis found to his cost. It was a nasty drizzly night, the roads muddy, the darkness intense, but Miss Herncastle went over the way as though she knew every inch of it. Davis dogged her—saw her within the gate of Bracken Hollow, saw her knock at the door, saw her admitted by an old woman, and saw no more of her that night.

"He waited until daylight, under the trees, in the drizzling rain; but no Miss Herncastle reappeared. He could stand it no longer; the fear of rheumatism was stronger even than his professional patience. He returned to Castleford, ate his breakfast, changed his clothes, came to me, and told me his story. When I tell *you* that Bracken Hollow is the residence of the late Miss Katherine Dangerfield's nurse—when you recall the striking resemblance Miss Herncastle bears to the late Miss Dangerfield—the coincidence, you will own, is at least striking. The question, in this state of things, naturally presents itself to an inquiring mind—Did Miss Katherine Dangerfield really die at all?"

"Go on," Captain O'Donnell said, with an immovable face.

"It is a question that has occurred to me many times. The resemblance—noticed by all who ever saw the late Sir John's adopted daughter—the coincidence of age—if Katherine Dangerfield had not died she would be precisely Miss Herncastle's age now—and, lastly, this familiarity with Bracken Hollow and Katherine Dangerfield's nurse. The grave is there to be sure; and yet— However, never mind that at present." Davis had a double duty to perform—to keep one eye on Sir Peter while the other was on the ex-governess. We had run the ex-governess to earth; we might leave her safely at Bracken Hollow for the present, and watch the baronet's movements. It will be a horrible thing for Ginevra, this separation. A woman in this case becomes totally extinct for life. I want to arrange matters amicably for this time, and I fancy it will be a lesson that will last her for life. I had sent Frankland back to town. I had called upon Sir Peter at the Scarswood Arms. I found him sullen, and doggedly obstinate beyond all description."

"'I've no objection to seeing your lordship for once in a way,' said this amiable nephew-in-law of mine; 'but if you've come to talk of your niece, or plead for her, I warn you it's of no use.'

"I ventured a mild remonstrance—'the natural levity of poor Ginevra's character—her vanity—her love of balls in

general—the deception of that infamous governess,' etc., etc. It was all eloquence wasted.

"'Women of thirty-five should have outgrown their natural levity,' returns my sulky baronet; 'and her vanity and love of pleasure have made a fool of her once too often. I told her not to go, and she went; I warned her of the penalty, and she defied me. I don't care a fig whether it was Miss Herncastle or Major Frankland—she thought it was Frankland, and that's enough. I'll never see her again—I'm blessed if I will! I'll have a separation—I'm blessed if I won't!' Only the word the noble baronet used was not 'blessed.' Upon that I left him and set Davis on the watch.

"He spent the day alone; when night came he went to Dubourg's gambling house. Davis entered, too, keeping well in the distance, his eye on Sir Peter. He staked and lost, staked and lost, again and again. He played for an hour, losing steadily. In a state of savage rage he was rising to go, when a waiter brought him a card with a line or two penciled on the reverse side. He looked astounded, Davis says, read it again, dropped it, and went forward to meet a stranger who entered. I'll show you that card presently. Davis picked it up unnoticed, and I think it will surprise even you.

"The new-comer was of medium height, very slender, very dark, with hair and mustache of that jetty black you never see in an Englishman. He was a stranger to Davis, and yet something struck him as familiar. Sir Peter put up his double eyeglass and stared in a helpless sort of way. 'What the devil drove *you* back to Castleford?' he heard Sir Peter say to him, 'I thought you were dead and buried centuries ago. And you've changed, haven't you? They used to call you good looking; I'll be hanged if I can see it now.' The stranger laughed good-naturedly.

"'Yes, I dare say I *have* changed,' he said, 'and not for the better. Six years' knocking about among the sweepings of Europe, and living by one's wits, is not a life conducive to beauty. I'm going back to America, and it struck me I should like to run down here once more and take a look at the old place. You look as though you wondered at that; well, perhaps it *is* to be wondered at. The truth is,' he took Sir Peter by the button and lowered his tone, 'I heard something of this—this ghost story, you know, and I had to come. Besides, I want to find out Mrs. Vavasor. I say, Sir Peter, can't we have a private room, and talk the matter over? I have a pocket full of

Napoleons here, and we can indulge in a little game of écarté at the same time.'

"The baronet was touched in his vital spot—écarté. They got the private room and had their little game. They played until long after midnight; when they came out, the baronet was in the wild state of elation he is always in when he wins. 'I thought luck would turn,' he said to Dubourg, when he came out. 'I've won sixty Naps of this gentleman, and mean to win as many more to-morrow night. Don't forget, Dantree; I'll give you your revenge to-morrow evening at the Scarswood Arms.'"

"Dantree!" O'Donnell exclaimed.

"I see you remember the name—Katherine Dangerfield's rascally lover. Here's the card Davis picked up in the gambling house."

O'Donnell was fully aroused now. He flung his cigar away and took the card. On one side was engraved the name "Gaston Dantree," on the other was written in pencil:

"My Dear Sir Peter—I *must* see you for a moment. I have heard this story of your seeing the ghost of K. D. Perhaps I can throw some light on the subject. G. D."

"This is extraordinary," the chasseur said; "pray go on, my lord."

"Ah, your interest is aroused at last. Wait until you have heard all. The two men parted in Castleford, High street, and Davis followed the wrong man, Sir Peter. His professional instincts told him the other was his game, but his orders were Sir Peter. The baronet remained within doors all next day—and Davis strolled quietly over to Bracken Hollow, and hung about the trees, keeping the windows well in sight. He made two discoveries—first that Miss Herncastle was still there, second that she and the old woman have a prisoner of some kind in hiding."

"A prisoner!" O'Donnell repeated, thinking of what he had heard at that gruesome house.

"A prisoner—an *idiot*. Davis is certain. It—he or she—he couldn't tell which, came to the window twice, jibbering and moaning, and uttering strange, unearthly sounds. Once the hard-featured old woman pulled him away, exclaiming, 'Drat the fool! a body can't turn their back but you're at the window.' The second time Miss Herncastle drew him back—speaking very gently and kindly. He saw her quite plainly, the window was up and she shut it down. As dusk drew on he returned to

Castleford and his watch on the baronet. Sir Peter was out—had gone for a walk—to the cemetery of all places; and Davis slipped into his room. If he could only stow himself away and see and hear what went on! There was an old-fashioned clothes-press at one end, with a small window, hung from within with a muslin blind. He ran the risk and took his post in there. At ten precisely Sir Peter entered and Dantree with him. The baronet sat with his back to the clothes-press, Dantree in plain view. Again Davis was struck with the familiarity of the face, but *where* had he seen it? He looked and listened, and the game went on. It was écarté, and, before the first quarter of an hour was over, he saw that the baronet did not stand the ghost of a chance against his adversary. Dantree was far and away the better player of the two. And he had sat down to win—his losses last night had been but the usual ruse. They played, and from the first game luck went steadily against the baronet. He ordered wine and brandy, he drank recklessly—his eagerness and fury were something horrible. Dantree won and won—his dark face like stone, his eyes devilish in their malice and triumph. Morning was breaking when he arose, and he held in his hand Sir Peter's check for eight thousand pounds. They had played for high stakes, and luck had gone dead against the baronet.

"'I'll win it back—by Heaven, I will!' Sir Peter cried, livid and trembling with fury. 'Remember, Dantree, you're to return to-night; I'll have it back or lose more.'

"Dantree bowed and smiled suavely.

"'I shall only be too happy to give you your revenge, Sir Peter. I shall return without fail to-night.'

"Sir Peter accompanied him to the door. Davis seized the opportunity to slip from his hiding place, half stifled from want of air, and half dead from want of sleep. But before sleep or rest was the necessity of finding out something more about this fortunate Dantree. He resolved to follow him home, and he did it. In the gray of the summer morning he dogged Dantree to his abode. It was—here is another astonisher for you—*Bracken Hollow*."

The chasseur could only sit and stare. "Bracken Hollow?" he murmured, helplessly.

"Bracken Hollow. And as he watched him enter, the whole truth burst upon him—the familiarity of his face, his walk—were explained. Gaston Dantree and Helen Herncastle were one and the same."

O'Donnell fairly rose from his chair in the intensity of his surprise.

"Impossible!" he exclaimed. "My lord, what is it you are saying? Oh, this is too much!"

"It is the truth—I am convinced of it. That woman is capable of anything—anything under Heaven. She personated Frankland at the ball, she personates Gaston Dantree now. Gaston Dantree in *propria personæ* it couldn't be—that I know."

"You know—how?"

"When I got that card, and heard Davis' description of him, I went to Dr. Graves, of Castleford. *He* knew him, you remember; and asked him for information. The description he gave me of Dantree in no way agreed with Davis' description, except in the color of the hair and mustache. I asked Graves if Dantree ever recovered from his fall downstairs. The doctor shook his head. I have asked Otis, and he says yes, but I don't believe it. He couldn't recover. Alive he may be—but if alive *he is an idiot.* It was impossible, from the nature of the injury he received, that health and reason could both return."

O'Donnell sat mute, his head in a whirl.

"Davis came to me, made his report, returned to the Silver Rose, and slept all day. Sir Peter kept his bed all day—I visited the Scarswood Arms and found that out. Then I took a stroll in the direction of Bracken Hollow. It is the loneliest of all lonely places—no one ever goes there. The thick growth of trees renders it a capital spot for a spy. Safely out of sight myself, I watched that upper window. I had my reward—the jibbering, idiotic face appeared, laughing, mouthing, and talking to itself. I had brought with me a powerful pocket telescope, and took a long look before any one came. O'Donnell, here is the crowning discovery of the whole—I believe that idiot hidden at Bracken Hollow to be Gaston Dantree!"

"Gracious Heaven!"

"Graves had described the face, remember, and I had a good look. The description tallied. It was a handsome face—or had been when the light of reason was there; black eyes, black hair—regular features, and shaven smooth. The idea would not have struck me had Graves not mentioned that Dantree, if alive, must be an idiot. The question is, what brings him there?"

"A question I cannot answer. I am utterly dazed and

stunned. I never heard such an extraordinary chain of occurrences in all my life. To think that Miss Herncastle should personate Gaston Dantree. My lord, it seems it must be simply preposterous. Why, Sir Peter knew Dantree—would see the imposture at once."

"Sir Peter would see nothing of the kind—Sir Peter is as blind as a bat, can't see two inches beyond his own nose. He takes Gaston Dantree for granted. Davis is right, you'll find. Was there ever such another woman in the world?"

"Never, I hope. And it is really your impression that Gaston Dantree, an idiot, is imprisoned at Bracken Hollow?"

"It is really my impression, and I can only account for it in this way: Katherine Dangerfield left him in charge of this Mr. Otis—from what I hear I infer Otis was in love with Katherine Dangerfield, and her wishes were sacred. He restored Dantree to health but not to reason, and placed him with the girl's nurse in this desolate house. That is my theory, and it will hold good in the end, you'll find."

"If you saw a portrait of this Gaston Dantree," O'Donnell said, thoughtfully, "you could tell, I suppose, whether or no it was the same face you saw at Bracken Hollow?"

"I am certain I could. But is it probable we can procure such a portrait?"

"It is possible, I think. Pray go on and let me hear all. Did Gaston Dantree or Helen Herncastle return to the Scarswood Arms that night?"

"That night was last night, and the *soi-disant* Dantree returned. Just before nightfall Davis resumed his post under the fir-trees to watch and wait. He was close to the house and kept his eye well on the windows. He *saw* nothing, but he heard as unearthly and blood-curdling a cry as ever came from maniac lips. If the house were not so utterly isolated and reputed to be haunted (from those very cries), the keeping of this imbecile there, unknown, could never have gone on this long. It was a hazy, muggy sort of day, sultry and sunless, and at half-past eight was quite dark. There was neither moon nor stars. Taking advantage of the gloom my detective actually entered the stone porch and examined the fastenings of the door. He found them, as he suspected, old and frail—in ten minutes at any time he could effect an entrance. No doubt the windows were the same, but before he could test the windows he heard bolts undrawn and voices from within. He had just time to dart behind the porch when Miss Herncastle made

her appearance—Miss Herncastle, *en garçon*, and a very flashing young fellow she makes, Davis tells me, black mustache, black evening suit, slouched wide-awake hat, and a wig of curly black hair. Davis has the eye of a hawk—he knew her instanter. A tall, hard-featured old woman followed; old Hannah, no doubt, once Katherine Dangerfield's nurse.

"'It's a daring game—a dangerous game, my child,' he heard the old woman say in an anxious tone. 'You'll play it once too often I greatly fear. Let Sir Peter once suspect, and you're caught like a mouse in a trap. He has the cunning of Satan. I know that of old.'

"'We both know it, don't we, Hannah?' he heard Miss Herncastle say—(there's no mistaking his description of her soft, slow, sweet tones; the one thing it appears she cannot change), 'and to our cost. Let us see if my cunning cannot overmatch his now. It's a long lane that has *no* turning. I think the turning for the most noble baronet of Scarswood has come, and he shall find it out shortly to his cost. Do you know the vow I vowed that last night long ago when he insulted me? "Living," I said, "I will pursue you to the ends of the earth—*dead*, I will come from the grave to torment you." Hannah, I have kept that vow. I *have* come from the grave—from the very jaws of death; to torment him. I have separated him from his wife—I have frightened him with ghost-seeing until his own shadow on the wall makes him tremble and turn pale, and last, but not least—I take his money. Six thousand in one night is a very respectable haul. Hannah—let us see if we cannot make it six more to-night. He doesn't know what a severe apprenticeship I have passed to all grades of skill for his benefit. He is paying me back the three thousand he once refused, with interest, is he not? Good-night, Hannah, don't fear for me. After to-night Sir Peter shall have breathing space. Try and keep our poor patient quiet; this seems one of his noisy nights. And don't sit up for me—there's a good soul. I won't be home until daylight.'

"A very remarkable and mysterious speech, is it not, O'Donnell? It struck Davis in that light, and he recollected every word of it, but then Davis has an uncommonly tenacious memory. What do you suppose she could have meant now by coming from the grave, and vowing vows, and all that melodrama? Did Katherine Dangerfield not die after all? Was that death and burial only sham; and is Miss Herncastle Katherine Dangerfield alive in flesh?"

His lordship looked keenly across the table at his companion. Still the chasseur sat like the marble Agamemnon behind him, his face locked in as stony calm.

"Go on," was his grim response.

"Davis followed, as in duty bound, and saw the personator of Mr. Dantree safe within the baronet's apartments. He hovered about the passage—airing his eye and ear at the keyhole when opportunity presented. They played the live-long night—the baronet more desperately, more recklessly than ever, more like a madman, indeed, than a sane gambler. He drank brandy at a perfectly furious rate—he doubled and redoubled the stakes and still he lost—lost. He seemed to go mad at last; an immense heap of gold and bank-notes changed hands. Davis calculates that he must have lost enormously—thousands. He sprang up at last as day was dawning, with a perfect shriek of rage and frenzy, accused Dantree of foul play, of being in league with the devil to rob him. Dantree laughed in his face, and swept the gold and notes into his pockets, filling them all.

"'I'll take your check for the remainder, Sir Peter Dangerfield,' he said, coolly; 'eighteen hundred pounds exactly.'

"The words seemed to goad the little baronet to madness; he sprang upon Dantree and seized him by the throat (I say Dantree, you understand, for convenience). The next instant there was a sharp click, and through the keyhole Davis saw the cold muzzle of a pistol held within an inch of the baronet's head.

"'You coward—you bully—you fool!' he heard Dantree say between his clenched teeth. 'Stand off, or, by the Lord that made me, I'll shoot you. Write out the check, or—'

"He did not need to say more. The baronet turned of a greenish white, and fell back with a yelp of terror. He wrote the check, his hand shaking so that he could hardly hold the pen, and passed it with a white face of abject fear to the other. Dantree pocketed it and the pistol.

"'I shall cash these checks at Castleford Bank to-day,' were his parting words, 'and I shall carry my pistol. Don't let me see you anywhere in the visible horizon. Shall we cry quits this morning, or shall I return to-night and give you a second *revenge?*' He laughed insolently in Sir Peter's face. 'Ah, I see. You've had enough. Well, good-morning to you, Sir Peter. My advice is like Lady Macbeth's: "To bed! to bed!" You really haven't the nerve, you know, for this sort of thing. As I've heard them say out in New York: "You can't gamble

worth a cent." Once more, most noble Lord of Scarswood, adieu!'

"Davis followed Mr. Dantree back, and saw him safely housed at Bracken Hollow. Then he returned—to report to me and take his necessary sleep. Off and on I have been on the watch myself to-day, but have discovered nothing. I also called upon Sir Peter this afternoon, and found him in bed—his complexion yellower than I ever saw it, his wizen face more wizen—a picture of abject misery and despair. He was only too glad to pour his piteous tale into any sympathetic ear. He had lost in two nights thirteen thousand pounds. Enormous stakes, surely. I got the story of the pistol, of Dantree's threatening language, of his conviction of foul play. Personal fear of that pistol alone prevents his giving the case into the hands of the police, and having Dantree arrested for carrying deadly weapons and threatening his life. Of his wife or the separation he declined to speak—THAT is a minor matter compared to the loss of his money. Now, my idea is, to find Miss Herncastle, prove my knowledge of her infamous conduct—threaten her with the law, and make her refund all, or part, of her ill-gotten gain. Then I shall make its restoration and her exposure the price of Sir Peter's peace with his wife. I see no other way at present to patch up matters between him and Ginevra."

"And that will fail," O'Donnell said, decisively. "You mistake both Miss Herncastle and Sir Peter if you fancy you can intimidate the one, or trust the other. She will laugh in your face as she did in his, and defy you, and he will promise whatever you desire, and break the promise, the instant the money is restored. *That* way is hopeless, believe me."

"Then what is to be done? Let this nefarious plot go on—let her escape with her spoils—let this idiot remain shut up there—terrifying all who hear him? O'Donnell, you know more of this extraordinary woman than you choose to tell; in the face of all this, can you still be silent? It is the duty of every man to hunt such a woman as that down."

"And yet to hunt *any* woman down seems hardly a creditable or manly thing. And Sir Peter Dangerfield and Gaston Dantree may have rightly earned all that has befallen them. I believe all you have told me of Miss Herncastle, and yet without being particularly maudlin or soft-hearted, I don't feel disposed to sit in judgment upon her. Wait, my lord, give me time to think. One's head whirls after all this."

"What is that you said about the bonâ-fide Dantree's picture? I would like to see it if you can procure it. Who has it?"

"I don't know that any one has it, but I fancy my sister may?"

"Your sister!"

"Yes—Rose. Your lordship will recollect she's from New Orleans, and I am aware she knows this Dantree. She did not speak of it—it was not necessary; and his acquaintance, as he turned out here, was hardly a thing to boast of. It still wants a few minutes of eleven," he pulled out his watch. "She may not have retired. I'll run up to her room, if you like, and ascertain."

Lord Ruysland signified his wish, and the chasseur ran, three steps at a time, up the broad, low stairs. He tapped at his sister's door.

"It is I, Rose," he said. "If you are up, let me in."

The door opened immediately—Rose, in a white dressing-gown, brushing out her long, dark hair, stood before him.

"What is it?" she asked.

"I forgot to ask you, when I promised to hunt up this fellow Dantree, if you had any portrait of him. Of course it is necessary to know what he is like, and no description is equal to a likeness. Have you one?"

She bent her head and moved away to her writing-case. Out of one of the drawers she procured a card picture wrapped in silver paper. She placed it in her brother's hand.

"It is—it was a most excellent likeness. Any one who ever saw him once would recognize it. Redmond, have you heard—is there any news of—" Her voice died away.

"I will tell you in a day or two. I have reason to think he is not dead. As yet of course I know nothing positively. In any case *you* are safe from him, Rose."

He was looking at the picture as he spoke. A photograph softly tinted—finely executed. In all its brilliant *beauté du diable* the fatal face that had wrecked the lives of Marie De Lansac and Katherine Dangerfield looked up at him from the card—the pictured eyes alight—the square-cut, perfect mouth half-smiling—faultless almost as the face of the Apollo. As he looked, O'Donnell for the first time could understand and almost forgive his sister's folly.

"A rarely perfect face," he thought, "a face to make a fool of any woman. And to think the end of all his brilliance, all his beauty, should be—Bracken Hollow."

He left his sister, rejoined the earl now pacing to and fro the library. In the past twenty years of his life Lord Ruysland had never been fully aroused from his supineness before—never entered heart and soul into anything as he was entering into the hunting down of this young woman. He paused and looked at the vignette.

"It is as I fancied," O'Donnell said. "Rose has his picture. No doubt he favored all the young ladies of his acquaintance with his handsome face. Here—look and tell me if his is the face you saw?"

Under his outward carelessness his pulses were throbbing with feverish fear. He handed the earl the picture. The next instant he was aroused as the earl uttered a cry of recognition.

"I knew I was right!" he said, in a voice of suppressed intensity. "This is the face I saw at the window—the face of old Hannah's visitor—younger, handsomer, but the same. This picture makes that much clear, at least—Gaston Dantree is the idiot of Bracken Hollow."

---

## CHAPTER XXV.

### THE LAST LINK.

THE late Parliamentary train rushing into the Castleford station some time after nine on the evening of this same eighth of August, brought among its passengers a little woman, dressed in black silk, wearing a Paisley shawl and a close black veil. The black silk was shabby, the Paisley shawl bore marks of age and wear, the little straw bonnet was last season's shape, and two words accurately describe the little woman tripping along the station—shabby genteel. She entered the ladies' waiting-room, her veil still over her face, leaving no feature discernible save the hard, bright glitter of the black eyes. She glanced around with a half-eager, half-frightened air, but no creature was visible save herself.

"I thought—I thought he might be here," she said, in a whisper under her veil. "I feel afraid to-night—I don't know

of what—I have had the feeling since I got the letter first What if it should be a trap—and yet how can it? Who knows—who would take the trouble? If I only dare inquire."

She stood in the middle of the room irresolute, went forward, came back, stood still again, undecided.

"I don't know what ails me to-night," she muttered. "I feel as though I were going to die or—or something terrible about to happen. Is it a presentiment? Lord Ruysland is here—*she* is here. My little one—*mine*—the only creature on earth that belongs to me. If I could only see her—if I thought Lionel meant what he says. It seems far too good to be true—it is like a dream."

She drew from the bosom of her dress a letter, and looked at the envelope and superscription. It was postmarked Castleford and addressed:

MME. HARRIET VAVASOR,
RUE DE ——, PARIS.

in a large, masculine hand. She opened it, and read for the hundredth time its contents:

"HARRIET:—I am in England once more, in Castleford, on a visit to Lord Ruysland. My wife is dead out in Quebec. After infinite trouble I have discovered your address. Harriet, I know all—the miserable story of my dead sister's plotting that separated us four-and-twenty years ago. If the memory of that time has not wholly died, if you are free as I am, come to Castleford and meet me. I enclosed a *billet de banque* in case you should need it. Do not ask for me—let no one suspect or frustrate us *this* time. We will meet in secret. On the night of the eighth of August, at ten o'clock, I will be in waiting near the gate of the house known as Bracken Hollow. You know it, beyond doubt. When we meet I will explain everything—the cause of this secrecy, why I have selected that particular spot, how I discovered *your* identity with the Mrs. Vavasor, who six years ago visited Sir John Dangerfield. Only come. I long for you as ardently as I did four-and-twenty years ago. You would not have failed me *then*; do not fail now.

"LIONEL CARDANELL."

She read this singular epistle over word for word, then folded and replaced it in her dress.

"If I only dare ask," she muttered again. "But if I obey him in one thing I obey him in all. And it must be all right. Who is there alive that knows—who would take the trouble to delude me? To think—to think, after all these years, I shall stand face to face with him again. His wife dead—he free. And I—if he should discover the hideous story of the past, *my*

past—all my crime—all my wrong-doing, the story of my life revenge."

The station clock struck sharply the quarter past nine. It aroused her; there was no time to spare. She walked resolutely out of the waiting-room—a fly stood near. She beckoned to the driver to approach.

"You know Bracken Hollow?"

"Surely, ma'am," looking suspiciously at the veiled face; "a main and lonesome place it be."

"I want to go there—at least to within a quarter of a mile or so. I will pay you now; how much?"

The flyman named his price. She counted it into his palm, and took her seat. In a moment they were rattling through Castleford High street on their way. She looked about her; how familiar it all was; the shops she knew so well—the Silver Rose where she had stopped, the cottage of Henry Otis, and (she shuddered as she looked at it) the lonely churchyard with its lonely grave. Poor Katherine Dangerfield! And Gaston Dantree—what had become of *him?*"

"It's a story I hate to think of," she thought. "That dead girl's face rises before me nights when I can't sleep—white and still as I saw her in her wedding-dress. And Gaston Dantree—I see *him* in my dreams as I saw him that night, all bruised and bleeding at the foot of the stairs. All dead, and through *me*. I wish I had been satisfied with my first revenge—when I gave the earl the wrong child. I wish I had let Katherine marry Dantree and live. It's a horrible thing to have a dead face haunt one's dreams."

They left the town behind and took the quiet lane leading to Bracken Hollow. The night was close—dark, moonless, starless; the trees loomed up black on every hand; no living thing was to be seen. That chill feeling of vague fear increased—it was all so strange, so unreal. Why had he come back? Why had he chosen this desolate spot? What was to come of it all? She shivered in the still warmth of the night and wrapped her shawl closer around her. The driver suddenly stopped.

"Bracken Hollow be yonder," he said, pointing with his whip. "Keep straight on—there's no mistaking it; it's not twenty yards from this."

He helped her to descend, then remounted, turned his horse, and went jolting back toward the town.

She stood in the darkness in the middle of the lane, where he had left her, feeling as lost as a shipwrecked sailor on a

desert island. She stood watching him until the last sound of the wheels died away. Then she reluctantly turned and looked before her.

Darkness everywhere—black trees—blacker sky—dead silence. She walked slowly on.

The gate of Bracken Hollow. Why, she murmured again—why, of all the lonesome places on earth, had he chosen this?

"It looks like the place for a murder," she thought, glancing fearfully around. "If some one should start out from these trees—some gypsy—or poacher—or—"

A cry broke from her; she started back. A tall figure *had* stepped out from under the black trees.

"*Harriet*," a voice said, "is it you?"

"*Lionel?*"

"Lionel Cardanell—yes. Then you *have* come! I feared you would not; you sent no answer. And after all those years, Harriet, we stand face to face again?"

Face to face, perhaps, but, in the deep darkness, the face of neither to be seen. Her heart was beating so fast that it seemed to suffocate her. She could not speak. He took both her hands in his, and led her on.

"This way, Harriet. I made Bracken Hollow the place of tryst because we can enter and talk undisturbed. I feared you would not come. I might have known you better; I might have known that whenever or wherever *I* called, you would have answered. Can you realize, Harriet, that it is I?"

She could not, indeed. No voice within responded to his tone or touch. That creeping sensation of fear was over her still. He had drawn her hand within his arm, and was hurrying her rapidly on. She looked up at him, tall above her, and strove to recall some resemblance. She could recall none. All was strange, vague, and unknown. She did not speak one word; she let herself be hurried on, breathless and palpitating.

They reached the gate; he opened it. The house loomed up, all darkness and silent amid its funeral trees. At sight of it she suddenly stopped.

"I *can't* go on!" she gasped—"I can't enter there! It looks like Hades itself! Oh, Lionel Cardanell, is this really you?"

"Come, come, come!" was his only answer, spoken firmly.

He hurried her forward; she had no power or strength to resist. The door was flung wide at their approach. Almost

before she could realize it she was in the house—in a lighted room; the door was closed behind her, locked and barred.

An old woman stood before her; at *her* she did not look. She turned to the man, trembling from head to foot. His coat-collar was turned up, his slouched hat pulled down; but hidden as his face was, she knew in an instant it was *not* the man she had come to meet.

"*Who* is it?" she said, in a sort of whisper, her black eyes gleaming fearfully through her veil.

He turned down his collar, took off his hat, and showed the pale, set face of—Henry Otis.

"You recognize me, Mrs. Vavasor? Yes, I see you do. It is many years since we met, but your memory is good, I know of old. Will you not put up your veil and let us see you. Further disguise is unnecessary."

She obeyed him. She flung back the veil and showed a face, aged, sallow, pallid with fear—all trace of beauty gone—nothing of it remaining but the wild black eyes.

"Mr. Otis," she gasped, "why have you done this?"

"To make you tell the truth at last," he answered. "There is but one way of dealing with such women as you—and that is the dark way of deceit. Yes, I wrote you that letter signed Lionel Cardanell. I knew that poetic idyl of your youth, you see; and it has succeeded better even than I hoped. You have no idea what a task it was to hunt you up, and then hit on a scheme to fetch you here; but I have done both. If you had not come to me, *I* should have gone to *you*. Take a seat; you look fatigued. Hannah, Mrs. Vavasor will take a glass of wine."

She sank into the seat, her eyes fixed fearfully upon him, her very lips trembling. Years and dissipation had told upon Mrs. Vavasor's strong nerves.

"Why have you brought me to this place?" she asked.

"Not to murder you—do not be afraid; though it looks gruesome enough for a murder, I dare say. I don't mean to do you the least harm—to do you good indeed—to make you tell the truth."

"The truth about what?"

He leaned across—there was a table between them, and his steely blue eyes seemed to cut into her very heart.

"*About the children you changed at nurse twenty years ago* The time has come for the truth to be made known. You gave

your daughter to the Earl of Ruysland, and you kept his. How will you answer to God and man for that?"

There had been a time when Mrs. Vavasor would have had pluck enough to reply as Claverhouse replied to the same question of the Covenanter's widow: "To man I can answer well enough, and God I will take in my own hand;" but that time was past. She sank back in her seat, her hands over her eyes, cowering, shrinking, like the guilty creature she was, before him—not daring to meet that stern, terrible face. The strange adventure, her nervous fear, the darkness, the solitude—all were telling upon her as such things tell upon women.

"It was rather a hackneyed plan of vengeance"—the cold, quiet, pitiless tones of Henry Otis went on—"taken second-hand from one of your favorite three-volume novels, and quite unworthy the originality and inventive genius you have displayed in later years. You make no attempt to deny it, I see; that at least is wise."

"I do deny it," cried Mrs. Vavasor, plucking up courage from sheer desperation at last. "I don't know what you are talking of. How dare you bring me here? What is the meaning of this infamous plot? How dare you detain me in this dreadful house? Let me go, Henry Otis, or it will be worse for you."

She rose up and faced him—at bay—her face gray with fear, and a hunted light in her black eyes.

"How dare you write me that letter!—how dare you sign that name!—how dare you bring me all the way from Paris to —to meet—"

She stopped suddenly, covered her face with both hands, and burst into a passion of tears—tears of rage, of fright, of disappointment. The old love for the handsome, high-born lover of her youth lived yet in her heart—that battered, world-hardened heart had throbbed with the purest rapture it had felt for years at the thought of seeing him once more; and it was bitter—bitter to her beyond all telling to have it end like this.

"If there be a law to punish such treachery as this, you shall be punished, Henry Otis, when I go free," she passionately cried.

"'When you go free,'" Mr. Otis repeated; "ah, but you are *not* going free! I don't do my work in that bungling way. As cleverly as *you* plotted to entrap Katherine Dangerfield six years ago, so I have entrapped you to-night. Pause a moment and think. No one—not a soul—knows you are here, and I

presume you have left no friends behind in Paris who will trouble themselves greatly to make search for you. Women like you make no friends. This house, as you have seen, is utterly lonely and isolated—it is reputed to be haunted—no one comes here who can possibly avoid it. And here you stay—though it shall be weeks, months—until you make a full confession. Make it to-night, and you go free—refuse, and you are locked up until you do. Here are pen, ink, and paper—dictate your confession and I will write it down."

She sat mute, dogged, her hands clenched, her lips shut, her eyes glittering.

"What do you know?" she asked, sullenly.

"Enough to send you to Newgate. That when Lord Ruysland came to your cottage to claim his child a year after its mother's death, you gave him *yours* and kept his. You kept the infant Lady Cecil Clive, and gave the Earl of Ruysland John Harman's daughter. John Harman's daughter lives in luxury at Scarswood Park to-night, and Lady Cecil Clive, the *real* Lady Cecil, is—*where*, Mrs. Harman? Sold like a slave to strangers in her third year—strangers who loved her, little thanks to you. Still your vengeance against her dead mother, who had robbed you of your lover, was not sated. On her wedding day you came forward and told the world she was not the daughter of Sir John Dangerfield—you took care not to tell *whose* daughter she was—you robbed her of her husband, home, and name—you killed her as surely as ever murderess killed her victim. *That* is what I know. The story Lord Ruysland shall hear, whether or no *you* confess. The law of England would force your story from you if I gave you over to it. I chose, however, to take the law in my own hand. Out of this house you never go alive until you have confessed."

She listened to him, her face settling, sullen and dark.

"I'll never confess. I say again I don't know what you are talking of. I gave Lord Ruysland his daughter—mine died. The child Sir John Dangerfield adopted was my—my cousin's daughter; I had an old grudge against her mother. I say again, Henry Otis, let me go, or it will be worse for you. Threats and illegal punishment are Newgate matters, if it comes to that Let me go, or I'll—"

What Mrs. Vavasor meant to do Henry Otis was never destined to hear. The words seemed to freeze upon her lips—her face slowly blanched to the ashen hue of death—her eyes dilated with some great horror. Henry Otis followed her glance.

Old Hannah had quitted the room unobserved some seconds before, leaving the door ajar. Through this door, without sound of any kind, a figure had glided. It stood now just within the doorway, perfectly still, its eyes fixed on vacancy. It wore a dress of some white summery stuff, its long, loose hair fell over its shoulders, its face was perfectly white, its eyes cold and fixed, its arms hung loose by its side.

So, as in years past she had a hundred times seen Katherine Dangerfield living, she saw her once more to-night *dead.* Dead surely—and this was her ghost.

She uttered no cry, no sound. Slowly, step by step, she recoiled, that utter horror on her face, her eyes fixed on the motionless figure, until the wall barred her progress.

"*Look!*" she whispered, in an awful voice. "*Look!*"

"Look where?" Henry Otis repeated, stoically. "I don't see anything."

"At the door!" still in the same awful whisper—"see—it is—Katherine Dangerfield! Look!"

"Well," Mr. Otis responded testily, "*I am* looking and I don't see anything. You're dreaming, Mrs. Vavasor. Katherine Dangerfield is in Castleford churchyard, is she not? She can't be at Bracken Hollow. Come! look at me, and leave off staring in that ghastly way at nothing."

She turned her eyes slowly upon him for an instant, then they moved back as if beyond all control of hers to the door. The specter had vanished. And Mrs. Vavasor, with a gasping cry, fell down fainting in a heap.

"Artistically done. You're the most useful of ghosts, Katherine," Mr. Otis cried, springing up. "Come in, pray, and fetch salts and cold water. I think she'll need no urging to tell now."

Miss Herncastle came forward, a smile on her face—the salts in her hand.

"I don't think she will. It was quite as much as I could do to preserve my gravity, standing stock still there under her horrified gaze. I am afraid I should have laughed outright, and spoiled the tableau if you had not called her attention off. Yes, I think we shall have the truth now."

"You had better go—she is coming round," said Mr. Otis, as the widow's eyelids fluttered; "vanish, Katherine, and send Hannah here. You'll hear all in the passage."

Hannah re-entered—Miss Herncastle disappeared. Mrs. Vavasor's black eyes opened to the light. She started up—

memory returning with consciousness—and grasped the arm of Henry Otis.

"Has she gone?" Her eyes went wildly to the door. "Yes, I tell you I saw her—Katherine—as plainly as I ever saw her in my life. Mr. Otis, for God's sake take me away—don't leave me or I shall go raving mad."

"I shall take you away, and I shall not leave you a moment alone, if you will speak the truth."

"Yes—yes, I will. I'll do anything—tell anything, only stay with me for the love of Heaven. I would rather die than see *her* again."

She cowered down into her chair, her face hidden in her hands, and in a sort of gasping whisper told her story.

"I confess it all," Mrs. Vavasor began; "I don't know how you have found it out, but it is true, every word. I *did* change the children. I hated the Countess of Ruysland; but for her I would have been Lionel Cardanell's wife. I married John Harman, but I despised him. Poor, weak fool, I was glad when he died. She gave me money, she gave me presents, and I took them all, and hated her more every day. She wasn't happy with her husband—*that* was some comfort. She was jealous—she had a furious temper; Katherine inherited it, you may remember." She shivered as she pronounced the name. "My baby was a month old the night she ran away from the earl in a fit of fury and came to me. I didn't care for the child; I always disliked children; I used to wish it might die. It was a great deal of trouble, and I hated trouble; and it looked like John Harman. Why should I care for it? She came to me; she thought I had forgotten and forgiven, and was her friend. She didn't know me, you see. That night *her* baby was born—a girl, too. Next morning she was dead. She died in my arms, in my poor cottage, without husband or friend near her. That would have satisfied most women—it didn't satisfy me. They came and took her away. The earl told me to keep and nurse the child—who so fit as I? I don't believe he ever looked at it. He didn't much care for his wife, but the manner of her death was a shock and a scandal. They buried her, and he went away.

"It was then that the plan of changing the children occurred to me. Some people believe the spirits in Heaven hear and see and watch over their loved ones on earth. No doubt the Countess of Ruysland was in Heaven—could a lady of her rank go anywhere else? Well, it would be a satisfaction to let

her see her daughter growing up in poverty and obscurity, and John Harman's in rank and luxury. His lordship paid me well; I sold out Harman's business and left the town, where I and the children were known. I went to live in a village some thirty miles away, where the fraud could be carried on in safety. I took no especial care of either of them, but they grew and thrived in spite of that. *My* daughter had brown eyes and flaxen hair, and was small and delicate-looking—much the prettier of the two. The earl's daughter had gray eyes and fair hair, and was large for a child of two years. She had her mother's temper and her mother's will; mine was one of the gentlest creatures that ever was born; I called the Earl's daughter *Katherine*. I called mine Cecil, as Lord Ruysland had desired *his* daughter to be named. I was well paid, but I grew tired to death of taking care of them and vegetating in a stupid village. I wrote to Lord Ruysland to come for his child.

"He came, and I gave him *mine*. I did not let him see the other at all; I told him my little girl was ailing, and he took the other away totally unsuspecting. Then I sold off everything and went to France, taking little Kathie with me. The collision in which I was badly hurt followed—the child escaped. In the hospital Colonel Dangerfield came to see me; he thought I was poor, and I did not undeceive him. His only daughter had been instantly killed—he offered to adopt little Kathie in her stead, and I closed with the offer at once. I never saw her again until, under the name of Mrs. Vavasor, I came to Scarswood Park, and met her as Sir John's heiress.

"I solemnly swear that the young girl who was known as Katherine Dangerfield was in reality the Lady Cecil Clive, only child of the Earl and Countess of Ruysland. The person who now bears that title is my daughter, christened Katherine Harman. I will swear this in any court of law. I changed them out of revenge upon the late Lady Ruysland.

"(Signed) HARRIET HARMAN."

The wretched woman wrote her name, old Hannah and Henry Otis affixed theirs as witnesses. He folded up the document, superscribed it "Confession of Harriet Harman," and placed it in his breast-pocket. She sat watching every motion with terrified eyes.

"What are you going to do with it?" she asked.

"I am going to place it in the hands of Lord Ruysland between this and to-morrow night. The rank and name your

daughter has usurped for two-and-twenty years, shall be taken from her before the expiration of four-and-twenty hours."

"It was no fault of hers," the guilty woman said with trembling lips.

"You made Lord Ruysland's daughter pay the penalty of her mother's actions—yours shall pay the penalty of hers For you," Mr. Otis arose, "Lord Ruysland shall deal with you as he sees fit."

She started to her feet and caught him as he was turning away.

"Take me away from this horrible house—now, at once. You promised, you know. Do anything you like, only take me away."

"Not to-night," he answered, coldly. "It is impossible. You would make your escape, and that I can't allow. Six years ago you had your day—this is mine. The mercy you showed Katherine Dangerfield then shall be meted out to you now. Don't be afraid—you shall not be left alone. You shall have a light. Hannah, take her up to the room prepared for her, and remain with her all night."

He drew himself from her grasp, and left the room. He heard her cry of terror and despair as he went out. Miss Herncastle still stood in the passage. He took her hand and led her into another room, and gave her the paper.

"The world shall know you as you are at last," he said—"shall give you the name you should have borne from your birth. Let me be the first to call you by it." He lifted her hand to his lips. "Lady Cecil Clive."

---

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### HUNTED DOWN.

IT was very early on the morning of the ensuing day—so early that the rosy spears of sunrise were but just glancing through the tall firs and waving brake around Bracken Hollow,—when a loud, authoritative knock aroused the inmates of the lonely old house from their slumbers. In five minutes, old Hannah was up and dressed, and in the room of her young mistress.

Katherine (let us call her by the old name) had sprung from her bed also as that authoritative knock resounded through the house.

"It must be Henry Otis—it can be no one else at this hour. Go open the door, Hannah, and let them in, whoever they may be."

"But my dear—"

"There is nothing to fear, whether it be friend or foe. If they do not come to me I shall go to them. The power is mine now, and the victory. Before the sun sets, Harriet Harman's confession shall be in the hands of my Lord of Ruysland. They shall learn, one and all, who the despised governess whom they have turned from their doors is to their cost."

"And then?" old Hannah said.

"Ah! And then— 'Sufficient unto the day,' etc. Go open the door, Hannah—there is the knock again; and on my word, whoever the gentleman is, he knocks commandingly."

Hannah went. She flung open the door and stood confronted by a tall man, with a dark, handsome, stern-looking face, and an unmistakably military air.

"I wish to see Miss Herncastle," this gentleman began, with perfect abruptness; "I know that she is here."

"Who are you, sir?" old Hannah demanded, with equal sternness; "and by what right do you come at such a time of morning as this, routing decent folks out of their beds?"

"My name is O'Donnell. I am Miss Herncastle's friend, and I have come to do her a service while there is yet time. Before two hours it may be too late. Give her this, I entreat you, and tell her I *must* see her."

"He says it as though he were a king," thought old Hannah. "He looks grand enough and noble enough for any king. O'Donnell? Why, he's the Irish officer who found her out—that she's most afraid of."

She stood irresolute, holding the card he had given her, and looking angrily and doubtfully from him to it.

I don't know what you want here—what you mean by coming here. You're no friend of Miss Herncastle's—I know *that*. You're the man that followed her—that has been her enemy and pursuer from the first. How dare you call yourself her friend?"

"I tell you," O'Donnell exclaimed impatiently, "I am her friend; I want to serve her if she will let me. She has rendered herself amenable to the law; she is an object of suspi

cion; the officers are on her track. If *you* are her friend, you will give her that card at once."

"Yes, Hannah, give it to me. I'm not afraid of Captain O'Donnell. Let me see what he has to say."

It was Katherine herself—in slippers and dressing-gown—her brown hair undone, rippling in the old girlish way over her shoulders. In that white négligé, with hair unbound and its natural color, she looked, with the rose-flush of the August sunrise upon her, younger, fairer, fresher than he had ever seen her before.

She took no notice of him. She received the card from Hannah gravely—and gravely examined it. Beneath his name in pencil was written:

"I know that you are here. I come as your friend. If you have any regard for yourself you will see me at once."

She looked up and held out her hand to him with a smile—a smile that had something of the old brightness, the old saucy defiance of Katherine Dangerfield.

"Good-morning, Captain O'Donnell. My friends are so few and far between at present, that it would be a thousand pities to refuse an audience to one of them. But *you* my friend! Isn't that rather a new rôle for the gallant Captain of Chasseurs?"

She led the way into the bare-looking apartment, where last night Harriet Harman had made her confession, and pointed to a chair. There was a grace, a triumph about her he had never seen before—the whole expression of her face was changed. Where was the sad, somber face of Miss Herncastle now? A sort of proud triumph lit all the face before him.

He accepted the chair only to lean across its wooden back and look at her. She stood where the golden sunshine fell fullest upon her—her tall form looking taller and more classic than ever in her trailing white robe, a crimson cord for her girdle. The brown hair was swept off forehead and temples, showing the scar on the left plainly, and adding to the nobility of her face. The black had been washed from the eyebrows—altogether she was changed almost out of knowledge. There was a smile on her lips, a light in her eyes, a glow on her cheeks that transfigured her. The hour of her victory had come; she stood before him

> "A daughter of the gods, divinely tall,
> And most divinely fair."

Yes, fair in this moment, if never fair before.

"Will Captain O'Donnell—my friend—who has hunted me down from first to last—speak? What is it that has taken you out of your bed at this uncivilized hour, and brought you to Bracken Hollow, and me?"

The ringing tone of her voice, the meaning sparkle of eye and smile, confounded him.

"It is so easy to be mistaken," she went on, still smiling. "I confess among the few, the very few I count as my friends, *your* name is the last I should ever dream of adding to the list. But then strongly marked characters have strongly original ways of proving their likes and dislikes. Hunting me down may be your way of proving your friendship. What is it Captain O'Donnell has come here at six in the morning to say?"

"To say you are in danger—to say your game is up, to say all is known—that the police are on your track, that this very day—or to-morrow at furthest, they will be here. To warn you for the last time."

"For the last time—to warn me of what?"

"To fly—I repeat, all is known—*all*."

"What does all comprise? May I ask you to explain?"

"It means that a detective has been on your track from the hour you quitted Scarswood, that by day and night you have been watched, that *you* are known as the Gaston Dantree who, by fair means or foul, has won an enormous sum from Sir Peter Dangerfield at cards—that the real Gaston Dantree is shut up here at Bracken Hollow—an idiot, and has been for years. Ah, you feel *that*. I repeat—all is known—all."

The smile faded from her lips, the old hard expression looked at him out of her gray eyes.

"A detective on my track. I did not dream of that indeed And to whom am I indebted for that delicate attention? To my friend, Captain O'Donnell, of course."

"No, Miss Herncastle, not in this instance. To the Right Honorable the Earl of Ruysland."

A shadow came over her face, a gray, somber shadow. She sat down suddenly with an altered expression.

"The Earl of Ruysland," she repeated. "What had I done to *him*? Ah, I understand—the law calls upon every honest man to hunt down a rogue. And the Earl of Ruysland has set a detective on my track. Is this all his noble lordship has discovered, or is there something else?"

"This is all he has absolutely discovered, but there is something else. He strongly suspects the death and burial of Kath

erine Dangerfield to be bogus, and Miss Herncastle and Katherine Dangerfield to be one and the same."

"Was it acting on this suspicion that you went up to London and nearly frightened poor Mrs. Otis to death?"

"I was acting on no suspicion—I rarely act on that. I was acting on certainty. I knew the grave in Castleford churchyard to be a fraud—the tombstone lying even more than tombstones usually lie. I knew that grave held an empty coffin."

"May I ask how?"

"In the simplest manner possible. I employed a resurrectionist, and I opened the grave. We raised the coffin, opened that, and found, as I told you—nothing."

"You did this?"

"I did this."

She sat and looked at him—wonder, not unmixed with a species of amusement and admiration, in her face.

"And yet you call yourself my friend. Captain O'Donnell, you're an extraordinary man."

"No; I don't see it," he answered, coolly. "It wasn't anything very extraordinary. From the hour I discovered your identity with the New York actress my suspicions were aroused. You had never given up the stage and buried yourself alive at Scarswood in the capacity of governess without some powerful latent motive. That motive I confess I felt curious to discover. Then you made love to Sir Arthur Tregenna—I beg your pardon—permitted him to fall in love with *you*." Katherine smiled once more. "As Sir Arthur had long before been signed, sealed, and delivered over to Lady Cecil Clive, and he seemed powerless to help himself, I felt called upon to help him. He is my friend, you know, so also is his affianced wife. Then you played ghost—oh yes you did, Lord Ruysland saw you—and frightened Sir Peter to the verge of insanity. Altogether you were too dangerous a sort of person to be allowed to go on without a short pull-up from some one. Destiny, I suppose, set me on your track—I didn't care about hunting you down, as you call it, and I gave you fair warning. You scorned all I could say; so, as a last resource, I went to London to induce Mr. Otis to cast his influence into the scale. You have proved more desperate and more dangerous than I supposed. Sir Peter is as nearly mad as it is possible to be, out of a straight-jacket, over his losses. For the last time I come to warn you—you are accused of cheating at cards, of placing a pistol at Sir Peter's head, and threatening his life."

Again his listener smiled as she recalled Sir Peter's ghastly face of fright. "It is an actionable matter to carry deadly weapons, and threaten the lives of her Majesty's liege subjects. Then you have worn male attire—you have secreted a dangerous lunatic, to the terror of the neighborhood; in short, the list of your evil deeds is appalling. The police of Castleford, armed with a search-warrant, will be here to-day or to-morrow at the furthest to search the premises—you will be arrested, imprisoned, and tried. Miss Herncastle, Miss Dangerfield,—I beg of you avoid this. Fly while there is yet time, and save yourself."

She looked at him searchingly—earnestly. "Captain O'Donnell, I wonder why—I cannot understand why you should take the trouble to come here and say this. You dislike me with a cordiality there is no mistaking—you have shown me very little quarter hitherto; what object have you in all this? Why should you endeavor to save a woman you hold in aversion and contempt? a woman, in short, whom you hate?"

"Whom I hate!" he repeated quietly. "Since when have I told you I hated you? I do not hate you—very far from it; and if I held you in aversion and contempt I certainly should *not* take the trouble of coming here to warn you. I have heard Katherine Dangerfield's story—a strange, sad story; and I believe her, even in this hour, to be more sinned against than sinning. She has made one great mistake—she has taken retribution in her own weak hand—she has forgotten who has said 'Vengeance is mine; I will repay!' I believe a great and generous nature has been warped. Commonplace women would have sunk under the blow; being a woman of genius she has risen and battled desperately with fate. And when a woman does that she fails; she must stoop to cunning, to plotting, to guilt. Katherine Dangerfield, I pity you—from my soul I do; and with my whole heart I stand before you your friend. It is not too late yet; pause, while there is yet time, on the road you are treading, and go back."

There was no mistaking his earnestness, the generous glow of his face, the friendly warmth of his tone. She had turned away from him and was looking out at the golden morning sky.

"Go back!" she repeated bitterly. "Is there ever any going back in this world? Six years ago I might have listened; to-day it is too late."

"It is never too late while life remains. It is only the turning point in your destiny. As yet you have been guilty only of

follies—not of crimes. Katherine"—her face flushed all over as he pronounced the name. She turned to him a sudden, surprised, grateful glance. "Katherine," he held out his hand, "for what I have said and done in the past forgive me. Let me be your friend, your brother, from this hour. I pity you, I admire you. You have been wonderfully brave and clever. Lay down your arms—give up the fight. Which of us can battle against Fate? Give me your hand—give me your promise. I cannot, I *will not* leave you until you do."

She covered her face with her hands, her breast heaving, the color burning in her face, moved to the very depths of her soul, with a passion of which he did not dream.

"I am taking Rose to France," he continued, coming nearer, his voice wonderfully gentle. "Come with us—you will be safe there. You have been sadly wronged, I know; but life deals hardly with us all. You know my sister's story—you know how *her* youth has been wrecked by the same hand that blighted yours. Let that be a bond of sympathy between you. Come with us to France; the friend to whom Rose goes will also shelter you. She means to work for her living, teaching in a French school; drudgery, perhaps, but she insists upon it, and I think myself labor is an antidote to heartbreak. Come, Katherine—you have fought long and well, and nothing has come of it. Give it up and come with Rose."

Her hands dropped from her face; something in the last words seemed to rouse her. She looked at him steadily.

"And nothing has come of it?" she repeated. "That is your mistake, Captain O'Donnell. Something *has* come of it I wonder what you would say if I told you—what?"

"Tell me and see."

"I confess," she went on, "to all the crimes laid to my charge. I am Katherine Dangerfield; I have been buried and risen from the dead, and with that resurrection my nature seemed to change. I have brooded on one subject—my wrongs—until I believe my brain has turned. I fled from the house of my true and loyal friend, Henry Otis, and went to America. I became the New York actress you so cleverly recognized. From New York I wrote to Mr. Otis. I told him if Gaston Dantree died, to bury him decently—if he lived, to furnish him with money to quit England; if he lived, and reason did not return, as he feared, to send him to Bracken Hollow—not to an asylum. I wanted him cared for; I had heard horrible stories of insane asylums. I knew Hannah would be

good to him for my sake. When all hope was at an end, Mr Otis obeyed, and for nearly five years poor Gaston Dantree has been the ghost of Bracken Hollow. As a rule he is quiet and harmless, but there are times when his cries are terrible, when he tries to escape from his room. He has to be watched unceasingly. All these years I remained in the New World I worked hard in my profession, and rose. I made money and I hoarded it like a miser. Day and night, stronger and stronger with each year grew the determination to return, to keep my vow. I tell you I believe there were times when I was insane on this subject. Death alone could have held me back. I waited patiently while burning with impatience; I worked; I hoarded, and at last my day came. I returned to England; I made my way into the family of Sir Peter Dangerfield; my revenge had begun.

"That, as you know, is not many weeks ago. It was a losing game from the first—I was playing to lose. I knew my secret could not remain undiscovered, but I dared all. Fate had taken my part in one way. I had a double motive in returning—one, my vengeance on him; the other, to discover my parentage. I had a clue; and strange to say, in working out one I was working out the other. You know what followed—I played ghost—Lord Ruysland was right—and terrified the master of Scarswood as I think he was never terrified before. I paid midnight visits to Bracken Hollow; I dared not go in the daytime. *You* remember all about that, no doubt. There was an unused entrance by which I came in and out. Lady Dangerfield tyrannized over and insulted me from the first; I have rewarded *her*, I think. And I have personated Gaston Dantree, and won Sir Peter's idolized gold. Why I personated Dantree I hardly know. Sir Peter was too blind to recognise me, and the whim seized me. How long I might have gone on, how it would have ended but for your recognition of me—your suspicion and discoveries, I don't know. I owe you no grudge; you were doing your duty, and I honor you for it. For Sir Arthur, you need not have been so much afraid; it was a triumph to take him from Lady Cecil—to anger Lady Dangerfield; but bad as I am, I don't think I ever was base enough to marry him, even if he had asked me. *He* had never wronged me, and I only waged war with those who did."

"You waged war with Lady Cecil Clive, in taking her lover from her, and she certainly never wronged you. She was your friend through all."

The hard look came over her face once more, a hard light in her large eyes.

"Was she? In your eyes, of course, Lady Cecil can do no evil. But what if I told you she had done me the deepest, the deadliest wrong of all?"

He looked at her in surprise.

"I don't understand," he said, a little coldly. "I believe Lady Cecil to be incapable of willfully wronging any one. And she always spoke gently of you."

She leaned her forehead on her hands, and pushed back her hair with a long, tired sigh.

"What a mockery, what a satire it all is—the world and the people in it! We are all sinners, but I wonder what I have done, that my life should be so accursed! Redmond O'Donnell, this morning I felt almost happy—a fierce, triumphal sort of happiness—I had fought a long, bitter battle, but the victory was with me at last. Now, if I could lie down here and die, I should ask no greater boon. My life has been from first to last a dreary, miserable failure. Oh, God! I want to do right. My life has been bitter, bitter, bitter, and I feel as though I were steeped in crime to the lips. If I could only die and end it all! But death passes the guilty and miserable by, and takes the happy and the good."

Her folded arms were lying on the table, her head fell forward on them as though she never cared to lift it again. From first to last she had been a creature of impulse, swayed by a passionate, undisciplined heart—a ship adrift on a dark sea, without rudder or compass.

"There have been days in my life—in the years that are gone—ay, in the weeks that I have spent yonder at Scarswood—when I have held the laudanum in my hand, to my lips, that would have ended it all. But I did not dare die—such wretches as I don't. It was not death I feared—*but what comes after.* Captain O'Donnell," she lifted her haggard eyes and looked at him, and to the last day of his life the hopeless despair of that face—the hopeless pathos of that voice haunted him, "what must you think of me? What a lost, degraded creature I must be in your sight."

He took both her hands in his, a compassion such as he had never felt for any human being before stirring his heart.

"What am I that I should judge? And if I thought so, would I ask you to be the companion, the sister of my sister? there is nothing but pity for you in my heart—nothing. Give

up this dark and dangerous life, and be true to yourself—to the noble nature Heaven has given you, once more."

She rose up—her hand still in his, a sort of inspiration shining in her face.

"I will!" she answered. "You—whom I thought my enemy, shall save me. I renounce it—the plotting—the evil—the revenge. And for your sake—for the love you bear her, I will spare *her*."

He looked at her in mute inquiry. She smiled, drew away her hands, and resumed her seat.

"You do not understand. See here, Captain O'Donnell, I told you, did I not, my second object in returning to England was to discover my parentage? Well, I have discovered it."

"You have!" he cried, breathlessly.

"I have discovered it. My father lives, and the daughter of my nurse occupies my place in his heart, the name I should bear. It is a very old story—changed at nurse—and that nurse has confessed all."

"You have done this. Then I congratulate you indeed! You will go to your father at once, of course! No one, believe me, can rejoice at this more sincerely than I."

"You mistake. I will never go. This morning I had intended—but that is all past now. If I renounce my revenge and wrong-doing in one way, I renounce it in all. I never understood half measures."

"But there is wrong-doing here—it is right—it is your duty to go."

"Captain O'Donnell, don't you see another is in my place? My going would bring shame, and disgrace, and misery upon her. My father is a very proud man—would it add to his pride or happiness to acknowledge such a daughter as I?"

"All that has nothing to do with it," the chasseur answered, with his stubborn sense of right and wrong. "Your duty is to go to your father, and tell him the truth at any cost to his pride or yours."

She smiled.

"I wonder if this would be your advice if—if, for example only—my father were the Earl of Ruysland. (I name him, you understand, as the first I think of.) Suppose I went to him and said, 'My lord, I, Katherine Dangerfield—Helen Herncastle—Gaston Dantree—any alias you please—am your daughter; she whom you call Lady Cecil Clive is but the daughter of your former servant, my nurse. She hated your

dead wife, my mother, and when you came to claim your child she gave you hers.' Suppose I said this—suppose I could prove it—what then? Would the earl clasp me to his bosom in a gush of parental love? Would Lady Cecil get down from her pedestal of birth and rank and let *me* mount? Think of the earl's shame and pain—*her* suffering—Sir Arthur Tregenna's humiliation; think how much happiness I, the usurper, enjoy. Bring the case home, and tell me still, if you can—to go."

"I tell you still to go. Right is right. Though the Earl of Ruysland were your father, though Lady Cecil had usurped your place, I should still say, go—tell the truth, be the cost what it may."

"You, who love Lady Cecil, give me this advice? Captain O'Donnell, you don't love her."

"I love her so well that I leave her; I love her so well that if the thing you speak of were possible, I would be the first to go and tell her. Once again—in the face of all that may follow—I repeat, *go!* Tell the truth, take the place and name that are yours, and let me help you if I can."

But still she sat keeping that strange, wistful, searching gaze on his face.

"You love her so well that you leave her," she repeated, dreamily; "you leave her because she is an earl's daughter and you think above you. If you knew her to be poor—poor and low born—"

"I would still leave her. It would make no difference. Poor or rich, gentle or simple, who am I that I should marry a wife? My soldier's life in camp and desert does well enough for me. How would I do, think you, for one brought up as Lady Cecil Clive has been? I can rough it well enough—the life suits me; but I shall never care to see my wife rough it also. Let us pass all that—I don't care to talk of myself. Lady Cecil Clive is not for me—any more than one of her Majesty's daughters. Let us speak only of you."

She rose up with a strange, unfathomable smile, crossed the room without a word, lit a candle and placed it on the table before him. He watched her in silent surprise. She drew from her pocket a folded paper, and handed it to him.

"You have done greater service than you dream of in coming here," she said. "Do one last favor. I want this paper destroyed. I have a whimsical fancy to see you do it. Hold it to the candle and let it burn."

He took it doubtfully. He read the superscription—"*Con*

*fession of Harriet Harman*," and hesitated. "I don't know — why should I? *What* is this?"

"Nothing that concerns any one on earth but myself. You will be doing a good deed, I believe, in destroying it. Let me see you burn it. *I* can do it, of course; but as I said, I have a fancy that yours should be the hand to destroy it. Burn it, Captain O'Donnell."

Still wondering—still doubting—he obeyed. Held the paper in the flame of the candle until it dropped in a charred cloud on the table. Then she held out her hand to him with a brave bright smile.

"Once more I thank you. You have done me a great service. You have saved me from myself. When do you and your sister leave?"

"To-day; but if I can aid you in any way—if I can take you to your father—"

"You are ready to do it I know; but I have not quite made up my mind about that yet. It is not a thing to be done in a hurry. Give me a few hours. Come back if you will before you depart, and if you have any influence with the Earl of Ruysland, don't let him send that search-warrant to-day. Let us say good-by, and part for the present."

He stood and looked at her doubtfully. He felt vaguely that never had he been farther from understanding her than at this moment.

"I will come," he said, "and I hope—I trust by that time you will have made up your mind to return to your father, and — if Rose wishes it—may I bring her to see *him?*"

"Certainly—he will not know her—poor fellow. He knows nobody. Farewell, Redmond O'Donnell,—my friend."

There was a lingering tenderness in her voice, in her eyes, that might have told him her secret. But men are totally blind sometimes. He saw nothing. He grasped her hand. "Not farewell," he said: "au revoir."

She went with him to the door. She watched him with wistful eyes out of sight.

"Farewell," she said, softly; "farewell forever. If Henry Otis had been to me what you are, six years ago I had been saved!"

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### THAT NIGHT.

THREE hours later, and Redmond and Rose O'Donnell had quitted Scarswood Park forever. The last farewells had been said—to Lady Dangerfield, weeping feebly, not so much at *their* loss as over the general distress and misery that was falling upon the place, the dread of her own fortune. To Lady Cecil, cold, and white, and still, giving her parting kiss to the sister—her parting hand-clasp and look to the brother. "Farewell forever, my love—my love—who loved me once," that long, wistful, hopeless glance said. To Lord Ruysland, politely affable and full of regrets to the last.

"Confound Mrs. Everleigh and her masquerade ball, and doubly, trebly confound Miss Herncastle for persuading Ginevra to go. The only consolation is we'll have *her* on the hip before night falls."

"And even that consolation I must ask your lordship to forego," O'Donnell said, with a half smile. "*I* have been to see Miss Herncastle. And there is no need of that search-warrant, my lord. I believe you are at liberty to enter and go through Bracken Hollow as freely as you please—if you only wait until to-morrow."

"My good fellow, do you know what you are saying? *Wait!* with such an arch-traitress as that! Wait! give her time to make her escape, and carry off her victim—her prisoner, whoever it may be, and start life luxuriously in London or Paris, under a new *alias*, and with poor Sir Peter's money. My dear O'Donnell, you're a sensible fellow enough in the main, but don't you think this last suggestion of yours betrays slight symptoms of softening of the brain?"

"My lord—no. You see I know Miss Herncastle's story and you don't—that makes the difference."

"Gad!" his lordship responded, "I am not sure that I care to know any more than I do. If her previous history be in keeping with its sequel here, it must be an edifying autobiography. *Is* her name Herncastle, or what?"

"Her name is not Herncastle. I do not know what it is I believe she does not know herself. My lord, she is greatly to be pitied; she has gone wrong, but circumstances have

driven her wrong. The bitter cynic who defines virtue as only the absence of temptation was right, as cynics very generally are. In her place I believe I would have done as she has done —ay, worse. Life has dealt hardly with her—hardly—hardly *I* tell you so; and to lean too greatly to the side of pity for the erring is not my weakness. Gaston Dantree *is* the ghost and prisoner of Bracken Hollow. She has confessed; but I believe he is well and kindly treated; and if, instead of caring for him there, she had left him to die like a dog in a ditch, she would only have given him his deserts. She has taken (fairly or unfairly, as you will—I don't know) a large sum of money from Sir Peter Dangerfield; but I say there too she has served him right. In her place I would have taken every farthing if I could. She has done wrong in the matter of the ball, but even then, treated as Lady Dangerfield daily treated her, I don't say I would not have done the same. From first to last I maintain Miss Herncastle has been more sinned against than sinning, and so your lordship would acknowledge if you knew all."

His eyes were flashing, his dark face flushed with an earnestness that rarely broke through the indolent calm of long habit and training. His lordship stood and stared at him aghast.

"Good Heaven!" he said, "what rhodomontade is this? *Is* the woman a witch? and have you fallen under her spells at last? And I would acknowledge all this if I knew all. Then, my dear fellow, in the name of common-sense tell me all, for I'll be hanged if I can make top or tail of this. WHO, in Heaven's name, is this greatly wronged—much-to-be-pitied Miss Herncastle?"

"Perhaps I ought to tell you—and yet it is such a marvelous story—"

"Egad! I know *that* beforehand; everything connected with this extraordinary young woman is marvelous. Whatever it is, it cannot be much more marvelous than what has gone before."

"My lord," O'Donnell said, hastily, "I see my sister waiting, and I have no time to spare. Here is a proposal: don't go near Bracken Hollow until to-morrow, until you have heard from me. Before I leave Castleford I will find time to write you the whole thing; I really don't care to tell it, and when you have read her story, I believe I only do you justice in saying you will let Miss Herncastle alone. I have reason to think she will leave Castleford to-day with my sister and me—that she will share Rose's asylum in France, and that all her

evil doings are at an end. To-night you shall have my letter—to-morrow do as you please. Once more, my lord, farewell."

He lifted his hat and sprang down the steps to where Rose sat in the basket-carriage awaiting him. Once he glanced back—he half smiled to see his lordship standing petrified where he had left him. He glanced up at a particular window. A face, that dead and in its coffin would never look whiter, watched him there. He waved his hand—the ponies flung up their heads and dashed down the avenue; in a moment Scarswood lay behind them like a place in a dream.

There was not one word spoken all the way. Once Rose, about to speak, had glanced at her brother's face, and the words died on his lips. *Did* he love Lady Cecil after all—had he loved her vainly for years?

They went to the Silver Rose. Miss O'Donnell had her former room, and there, wrenching himself from the bitterness and pain of his own loss, he told her the story of Gaston Dantree.

"If you would like to see him, now is your time," he said. "I am going to Bracken Hollow. You can come if you like."

She listened in pale amaze, shrinking and trembling as she heard. An idiot for life! At the horror of that fate all her wrongs paled into insignificance—what awful retribution was here? She rose up ashen gray with pity and horror, but tearless and quiet.

"I will go," she answered.

He procured a fly, and they started at once. Again it was a very silent drive. Redmond O'Donnell forced his thoughts from his own troubles; brooding on hopeless loss of any kind was not his nature, and thought of Katherine. He almost wondered at himself at the pity he felt for her—at the sort of admiration and affection she had inspired him with. How brave she was, how resolute, how patient; what wonderful self-command was hers. What elements for a noble and beautiful life, warped and gone wrong. But it was not yet too late; the courage, the generosity, the nobility within her would work for good from henceforth. He would take her to France, her better nature would assert itself. She would one day become one of these exceptionally great women whom the world delights to honor. She—he paused. They had drawn up at the gate, and standing there with folded arms, with rigidly compressed lips, with eyes that looked like gleaming steel, stood Henry Otis

The Algerian soldier knew him at once, and knew the instant he saw him something had gone wrong. As he advanced with his sister Mr. Otis flung open the gate, took off his hat to the sister, and abruptly addressed the brother.

"I have the honor of speaking to Captain Redmond O'Donnell?"

"I am Captain O'Donnell, Mr. Otis," was the calm answer "I come here with my sister by Miss Herncastle's permission."

"I inferred that. This is your second visit to-day?"

"My second visit," O'Donnell added, secretly wondering why the man should assume that belligerent attitude and angry tone. "I trust Miss Herncastle is here? I came, expecting to meet her."

"Miss Herncastle is *not* here!" Otis replied, his eyes glancing their irate steely fire; "she has gone."

"Gone!"

"Gone—fled—run away. That would not surprise me; but *this* does." He struck angrily an open letter he held. "Captain O'Donnell, what have you been saying to her—what influence do *you* possess over her that she should resign the triumph of her life, in the hour of its fulfillment, for you? By what right do you presume to come here, and meddle with what in no way concerns you?"

Redmond O'Donnell stood and looked at him, his straight black brows contracting, his voice sinking to a tone ominously low and calm.

"Rose," he said, "step in here and wait until I rejoin you." She obeyed with a startled look. "Now then, Mr. Otis, let us understand one another; I don't comprehend one word you are saying, but I *do* comprehend that you have taken a most disagreeable tone. Be kind enough to change it to one a little less aggressive, and to make your meaning a little more clear."

"You don't understand?" Otis repeated, still with suppressed anger. "Have you not been the one to counsel her to renounce the aim of her life, to resign her birthright because, forsooth, the woman who has usurped it is your friend? Have you not been the one to urge this flight—to compel this renunciation?"

"My good fellow," O'Donnell cried impatiently, "if you intend to talk Greek, talk it, but don't expect me to understand. And I never was clever at guessing riddles. If Miss Herncastle has run away, I am sincerely sorry to hear it—it is news to me. What you mean about renouncing her birthright and all that

*you* may know—I don't. I urged her to give up the life of falsehood and deception she has been leading lately for one more worthy of her, and I understood her to say she would. The influence I possess over her is only the influence any true friend might possess. Farther than that, if you want me to know what you are talking about, you will be kind enough to explain."

And Henry Otis, looking into the dark, gravely haughty face knew that he spoke the truth. He handed him the letter.

"It is from her," he said, "to me. Read it."

O'Donnell obeyed. It bore date that day, and was significantly brief.

"HENRY—MY BROTHER: You will be surprised—pained, angered, it may be—when I tell you I am going, and coming back no more. I give it all up—all the plotting, the weary, wicked, endless scheming that brought revenge perhaps, but never happiness. And the *confession is burned!* They shall never know—neither my father, nor she who has taken my place unwittingly, shall ever be rendered miserable by the truth. I can remember now that *she* at least was ever gentle and sweet to me. If I told them to-morrow, I could not, would not take her place; my father would never care for me—would look upon me as a shame and disgrace. Let it go with all the rest. Captain O'Donnell has proven himself my friend; for his sake I renounce my cherished vengeance. Let the miserable woman we have lured here go. Care for poor Gaston as you have always cared. Do not follow me; when happier days come I will go to you. Do not fear for me; I will not return to the stage; I shall live honestly and uprightly for the time that is to come, God helping me. Sir Peter Dangerfield's money is in Hannah's keeping; restore it to him; I would die sooner than use it. Tell Captain O'Donnell that while I thank him—thank him with all my heart and soul—I still cannot go with him. *For my own sake* I cannot. He has been my salvation; to my dying day his memory and yours will be the dearest in my heart. Dear Henry, my best friend, my dearest brother, farewell! I have been a trouble, a distress to you, from the first; this last flight will trouble and distress you most of all; but it is for the best—the rest never were.—Farewell! KATHERINE."

Redmond O'Donnell looked up from the letter with a face of pale wonder.

"What does she mean?" he asked. "'Dare not come with me for her own sake!' What folly is this?"

Henry Otis returned his glance gloomily enough. *He* understood, if O'Donnell did not.

"Who can comprehend a woman—least of all such a woman as Katherine Dangerfield? But for once she shall be disobeyed. For six years I have obeyed her in good and in evil; now I refuse to obey longer. The truth shall be told—yes, by Heaven!—let their pride suffer as it may. They shall know

that the girl upon whom they trampled is of their blood! He, with all his dignity and mightiness, shall find she is his daughter!"

"Who?" O'Donnell asked, with a pierceing glance. But Henry Otis moodily drew back.

"Yonder is Hannah—if you want to see the miserable wretch hidden for five years at Bracken Hollow, you had better go. I shall tell him, not you."

His angry jealousy flashed out in every look, in every word. He hated this man—this dark, dashing, Irish soldier—with his magnificent stature, his handsome, dusk face. Katherine loved him! Was it part of her wretched destiny *always* to love men utterly indifferent to her, while he—all his life it seemed to him he had lain his heart at her feet, and it had been less to her than the ground she trod.

He turned away from him in a passion of wrath against her, against the tall, haughty, amazed chasseur, against himself and his infatuation, and dashed into the belt of gloomy woodland that shut in the gloomy house.

"I'll tell at least!" he thought, savagely. "I'll humble the Earl of Rnysland; and for her—let her resent it if she will. I have been her puppet long enough. While she cared for no one more, I hoped against hope, but now that she has fallen in love with this Irish free-lance, let her go. My slavery ends from to-day."

O'Donnell looked after him, angry in his turn—then glancing at his watch and seeing that time was flying, he rejoined his sister waiting anxiously in the porch.

"Who is that man, Redmond?" she asked, timidly—"were you quarrelling? How angry he looked!"

"*I* was not quarrelling," he answered, shortly. "Rose, we have no time to spare. See this man if you will, and let us go. I want to catch the five o'clock train."

Old Hannah was in waiting—she too looked gloomy and forbidding. Her nursling had fled—in some way this young man had to do with it, and Hannah resented it accordingly. He saw it and asked no questions—he felt no inclination to subject himself to further rebuffs. Let them all go—he did not understand them—he washed his hands from henceforth of the whole affair.

Hannah in silence led the way up a dark, spiral staircase to an upper room. She cautiously inserted a key and unlocked the door.

"Make no noise," she said in a whisper; "he's asleep."

She softly opened the door and led the way in. They followed, Rose clinging to her brother's arm—white, trembling from head to foot. She was led to a bed; upon it a figure lay, asleep, motionless. A hot mist was before her eyes; for a moment she could not look; then it cleared away. She strove to command herself, and for the first time in seven years Rose Marie Dantree looked upon her husband's face.

There was nothing revolting or terrible in the sight. As he lay asleep all the old beauty was there—the calm, the peace. One arm supported his head—he was neither worn nor thin—he had changed very little. The classic profile was turned toward them—the long, black lashes swept his cheeks, the lips were parted in something like a smile, the glossy, black, curling hair was swept off the forehead. He looked beautiful as he lay there asleep. And over Rose's heart the old love surged—the great wrong he had done her was forgotten—she only remembered she had been his wife, and that he *had* loved her once. Her face worked—she sank on her knees.

"Gaston! Gaston!" she whispered, growing ghastly.

He started in his sleep—the dark, large sunken eyes opened and looked at her. As she met them the last trace of life left her face—she sank backward—her brother caught her as she fell.

"I might have known it would be too much for her," he said. "I should never have let her come."

She was on the grass outside the gate when she recovered, her brother bathing her forehead and holding her in his arms. She looked up into his eyes, burst into a sudden passion of crying, and hid her face on his breast. He was very patient and gentle with her—he let her cry in peace. Presently he stooped and kissed her.

"If you are ready we will go now, Rose," he said. "You must not see him again. It can do no good—his case is hopeless—he knows no one, and when he is disturbed he gives trouble, the old woman says. Come, Rose, be brave—it is hard on you, but life is hard on all of us. Since we *must* bear our troubles, let us at least bear them bravely."

She went without a word. She drew her veil over her face, and cried silently behind it. They reached the Silver Rose; Lanty and the luggage were here. The luggage was ready for the railway, but Lanty was nowhere to be seen. The sound of voices in the courtyard, however, guided his master—

Mr. Lafferty's mellifluous Northern accent was not to be mistaken.

"See now—that I may niver sin (God pardin me for swearin) —but I'll come back to ye—an' maybe marry ye—if I don't see anybody I like better. Arrah! where's the good av' cryin' and screechin' in this way? Shure me own heart's broke intirely—so it is. An' thin ye can write to me when I'm away, an' isn't that same a comfort? Faith! it's a beautiful hand ye write—aquil to iver a schoolmaster in Ballynahaggart. An' ye'll dait yer letthers in this way: 'Misther Lanty Lafferty, in care o' the Masther. In Furrin parts.' Arrah! hould yer noise, an' don't be fetchin the parish down on us. Far or near, amn't I ready to stick to ye, Shusan, through thick an' thin? Arrah, is it doubtin' me ye are? See now, it's the truth I'm tellin'; that I may go to my grave feet foremost if it isn't."

Mr. Lafferty and the rosy-cheeked barmaid were ensconced behind a tree, Lanty seated on the pump, Susan dissolved in tears—a love-scene, undoubtedly. Susan's reply was inaudible, but her lover might be heard by any one who chose to listen.

"Why don't I lave him, is it? Upon me conscience, thin, it's long and many's the day ago I'd av left him wid his sodgerin' an' his thrampin' if I cud have found iver a dacent Irish boy to thrust him wid. But there it was, ye see—av a bullet from a rifle, or a poke from a pike cut his sodgering short, I was always to the fore to close the corpse's eyes, an' wake him comfortably, and see that he had a headstone over him, as a dacent O'Donnell should. But, shure—(this is a saycret, mind)—her ladyship, good luck to her! has him now, or will shortly; an' troth if he's half as unaisy, an' half as throublesome on her hands as he is on mine, it's hersilf 'll be sick an' sore av her bargain. An' it's on me two knees I'd go to ye this minute, me darlin, av it wasn't owin to the dampness of the grass, an' the rheumatism that does be throublin' me in the small av me back, an' ax ye there, fornint me, av ye'll be Misthress Lafferty. And faith! it's not to more than half a dozen young women livin' I'd say the like."

"Lanty! I say, you scoundrel, do you want to be late?" called the voice of his master. "Come along here—there's not a minute to lose."

"Oh, tare an' ages! Shure there he is himself! Give us a kiss, Shusan, me darlin' av' the wurruld, an' long life to ye till I come back."

There was the very audible report of a very audible embrace,

and then Mr. Lafferty in great haste made his appearance round the angle of the building.

"Comin', sir—comin', yer honor. Niver fear but I'll be in time. I'll be at the station below in a pig's whisper."

There was barely time to attend to the luggage, pay the bill, and drive to the station. They caught the train, and no more. There had been no opportunity of writing his lordship the explanation he had promised. It must be postponed until their arrival in London.

"I may as well tell him all, and entreat him to let her alone. Even Sir Peter, when he learns who she is, and receives his money back, will hardly care to further persecute Katherine Dangerfield. And she dare not go with me for her own sake! Hum—m—I don't understand *that*."

It was late when the lights of the great metropolis flashed before them. They drove at once to a quiet family hotel, and late as it was, Captain O'Donnell sat to write and post the promised letter to Lord Ruysland. He told him at length of the story of his suspicions, of the night visit to Bracken Hollow, when his lordship had seen him accompany Miss Herncastle home, of the scar on the temple, of the opening of the grave—of the "confirmation strong as Holy Writ"—the accumulated evidence which had proven her Katherine Dangerfield.

"Her sins have been forced upon her," he wrote; "her virtues are her own. In the hour of her triumph she resigns all—confesses all, and sends back the money won to Sir Peter Dangerfield. She has gone—let her go in peace. She has suffered enough to expiate even greater wrong-doing than hers. I believe she has made a much greater renunciation—I believe she has destroyed or caused me to destroy, the paper that would have proved her birthright. It was superscribed 'Confession of Harriet Harman,' and now that I have had time to think over her words, I believe that confession proved her parentage. As I understand her, this Harriet Harman was her nurse, and for some reason of her own, placed another child in her stead, took her from England, and in France gave her to Sir John Dangerfield. Her assertion of her claims, she said, could bring nothing but misery—pain and shame to her father—suffering and disgrace to her who stood in her place. So in the hour of its fruition she deliberately destroyed her last hope, and has gone forth into the world to labor for her bread, leaving another to usurp her name and station. Sacrifice less great has been

made, and called itself martyrdom. If you ever meet her again, my lord—be her friend as I would have been, had she allowed me."

The dawn was gray in the August sky as Captain O'Donnell posted this letter. Two hours later, as he sat at their early breakfast with his sister, the cab that was to carry them to London Bridge station waiting at the door, one of the small boys telegraph offices employ, approached him with an ominous yellow envelope in his hand. O'Donnell tore it open—it was a cable message—dated New Orleans, and in a dozen words changed the whole tenor of his life.

"REDMOND O'DONNELL:—My wife and son are dead. For God's sake come to me at once and fetch Rose. LOUIS DE LANSAC."

Lord Ruysland, without knowing why, obeyed Redmond O'Donnell and postponed that forcible visit to Bracken Hollow.

"It isn't like O'Donnell to be swayed by any sentimental impulse," his lordship mused; "he generally has some sound reason for what he does and says. I wonder what he meant by that profession of sympathy and compassion, and the rest of it. She is a fine woman—an uncommonly fine woman; but the big chasseur isn't the sort to be influenced by *that*. I'll wait until I get his letter at least, and upon my life I hope I'll get it soon, for I feel as curious as a woman."

He was taking a gentle evening constitutional around the big fish-pond, feeling very much bored, and waiting for the dinner-bell. Men and women around him might sin and separate, love and part, but all that was over and done with long ago, with the Right Honorable the Earl of Ruysland. Life flowed on, a tranquil river—it's only ripple duns and digestion; passion and he had long ago shaken hands and parted. The house was insufferably dull; O'Donnell, his sister, Sir Arthur, and Sir Peter gone; Lady Dangerfield in alternate fits of tears, hysterics, scolding, and sulks; and his daughter moving about the rooms in her light shining summer dress, more like some pale spirit of a dead Lady Cecil than her living self.

"Life has a natural tendency to the contraries," his lordship moralized, plaintively; "human nature inclines to the zig-zag. Now why, in Heaven's name, must Ginevra, gifted with the average of woman's cunning—quarrel with her lord and master—defy Sir Peter, and involve herself and all her relations in trouble? Why can't Queenie bloom and smile as the affianced

bride of one of the richest young baronets in the United Kingdom should, instead of fading away to a shadow? Why need O'Donnell ever have crossed her path again? I know she is in love with that fellow. Isn't the world big enough for him without coming to Castleford? And, finally, why couldn't Miss Herncastle have selected some other peaceable country family to play her devilish pranks on as well as this? Life's a game of contraries, I repeat—it reminds one of the child's play: 'When I say Hold Fast, You Let Go!' Ah, good evening, sir; do you wish to speak to me?"

Lord Ruysland lifted his hat blandly. For the last two or three minutes he had been watching a tall young man approaching him—a perfect stranger—with the evident intention of speaking. As he paused before him, his débonnaire lordship took the initiative, lifted his beaver, and addressed him.

"You wish to speak to me, sir?" he repeated, suavely.

"I wish to speak to you, if, as I think, you are the Earl of Ruysland."

"I am the Earl of Ruysland, and I have the honor of addressing—?"

"My name is Henry Otis. Six years ago I was Dr. Graves' assistant and medical practitioner in Castleford. If your lordship has ever heard the story of Katherine Dangerfield, you may also have heard of me."

Lord Ruysland's double eye-glass went up to Lord Ruysland's light-blue, short-sighted, English eyes, and Lord Ruysland replied, with the languid drawl of English high life:

"Aw, Katherine Dangerfield, that ubiquitous young woman again. Um, yaas, I have heard the story of Katherine Dangerfield until the mere sound of her name grows a bore. I have also heard in connection with that very tiresome young person the name of—aw—Mr. Henry Otis. Now may I ask what Mr. Otis can have to say on this—er—threadbare subject, and why he feels called upon to say it to *me?*"

"For the best reason in the world—that I believe *your* lordship has the honor of being Katherine Dangerfield's father!"

Like a bolt from a bow—like a bullet whizzing from a rifle, the truth came. And Henry Otis folded his arms and stood before the noble peer with a grimly triumphant face.

"Your daughter!" he repeated. "You understand, my lord, your only daughter. For the past twenty years your lordship has been laboring under a monstrous delusion. Katherine Dangerfield was your daughter"

No shadow of change came over the earl's placid face. With his eye-glass still up he stood and stared calmly at Henry Otis.

"You're not a lunatic, I suppose," he said, meaningly "You don't look as though you were. Still you'll excuse me if I venture to doubt your perfect sanity. Have you any more remarks of this extraordinary nature to make? For if you have"—he pulled out his watch—"my time is limited. In ten minutes the dinner-bell will ring, and it is one of the few fixed principles I have taken the trouble to retain, never to be late for dinner."

"My lord," Henry Otis said, "you do not believe me, of course—what I say cannot sound otherwise than mad and presumptuous, and yet it is true. I beg of you to listen to me—I happen to be able to prove what I say. Carry your mind back twenty years, and tell me if you happen to remember Harriet Harman?"

"I remember Harriet Harman perfectly well. Will you pardon me, Mr. Otis, if I say I think you are troubling yourself greatly with what in no way concerns you, and what I have no desire to hear."

"By Heaven, my lord, you *shall* hear!" Henry Otis cried, his sallow face whitening with anger, "if not in private here, then in the public print. I am not mad, though my assertion must sound like madness to you. I can prove what I say. Twenty years ago, when Harriet Harman gave you the child you came to claim, she gave you—*not* the daughter of the late Countess of Ruysland, but her own."

There were five seconds' blank silence. The face of Henry Otis was white, his pale eyes flashing. For the earl—not a muscle of his well-trained countenance twitched, not a shadow of change came over his high-bred face. His eye-glass was still held to his eyes, his thin lips set themselves a trifle more closely—that was all.

In the surprise of the moment, in the suddenness of the interview, both had forgotten where they were. Neither saw a slender figure in white dinner dress, a white lace mantilla thrown over its head, that had descended from the portico and approached over the velvet turf. The last words of Henry Otis reached her. She stopped as if shot. The memorable King's Oak was near—under its dark, wide shadow she stood still to listen.

"This is a marvelous statement, Mr. Otis," the peer said,

with perfect calm. "Will you pardon me once more if I find it impossible to believe it? Harriet Harman gave me *her* child instead of mine twenty years ago! What egregious nonsense is this—taken second-hand from one of last century's romances? I can only wonder at a gentleman of your good sense repeating it."

"Taken from a romance, or what you please, my lord," Henry Otis said, doggedly, "but true—true as Heaven is above us. Harriet Harman swore vengeance upon your wife for separating her from her lover, and that vengeance she wreaked on her child. I repeat it—she changed them. *Her* child was a month old when yours was born—your lordship knew or cared nothing about it—never saw it until it was given to you as your own. You saw nothing of your own either from the day of its birth. Again I repeat, when you returned to England and Mrs. Harman, she gave you her own daughter and retained yours. The young lady whom you have brought up, whom you call Lady Cecil Clive, is in reality Katherine Harman."

There was a sobbing cry from beneath the tree. Neither heard it. His lordship made a step forward.

"You villain!" he said, in a voice scarcely above a whisper; "by Heaven! I'll throttle you if you repeat that lie!"

"It is the truth," Henry Otis retorted, in cold disdain. "I can prove it. Harriet Harman is here—ready to swear to what I say."

"And do you think I would believe her oath if she did!" Lord Ruysland cried; but his face grew a dreadful livid gray as he said it. "This is some nefarious plot got up between you to extort money, no doubt, but—"

He stopped. Henry Otis turned his back upon him in contempt.

"I see it is useless talking to you. A court of law, perhaps, will be more easily convinced. Harriet Harman is here, and ready to repeat the story. Once more I assert Katherine Dangerfield is your daughter—she who is known as the Lady Cecil Clive is *not*. Before you are a week older I think even your incredulity will be staggered. I have the honor to wish your lordship good-evening. There is the dinner-bell. As your lordship's fixed principles are so few, don't let me be the man to infringe the most important of them."

He lifted his hat in mocking salute and turned to go. But his lordship strode forward and caught him by the shoulder.

"Stay!" he said, in a ringing tone of command. "You have said either too much or too little. Why do you repeat Katherine Dangerfield *is* my daughter? Katherine Dangerfield is dead."

Mr. Otis smiled, and drew himself away.

"I decline to say more to your lordship at present. I tell you the truth, and you accuse me of a lie. That is sufficient. Harriet Harman is at Bracken Hollow—either to-night or to-morrow your lordship can see her there. If you refuse to believe what she says, the matter shall be placed in the hands of justice. Katherine Dangerfield, whether living or dead, shall be avenged."

He paused. During the last five minutes a sudden red, meteor-like light had flashed up in the gray southern sky. Whilst he talked it had steadily increased—brighter and broader—redder and fiercer it grew—it could be only one thing—*fire!* At that instant there came clashing across the twilight stillness, the fire bells of the town—the red light in the sky growing redder and redder.

"Fire!" Henry Otis exclaimed, knitting his brows, "and in that direction. There is no house there but Bracken Hollow. What if that lunatic, Dantree, has got out of his room and succeeded in what he has attempted so often—setting fire to the house!"

Clash! clang! The fire alarm grew louder, the flames were shooting up into the soft gray sky. One of the grooms came galloping up the avenue, flinging himself out of the saddle at sight of the earl.

"Where's the fire, my man?" Otis called.

"At Bracken Hollow, zur; and it be all ablaze as I coom oop—" But Otis did not wait for the completion of the sentence. With one bound he was on the back of the horse, and dashing down the avenue like the wind.

"I might have known," he said between his clenched teeth, "what would come of keeping Hannah with Harriet Harman. Dantree has got free, and found the matches, and succeeded at last in what he has failed so often—setting fire to Bracken Hollow."

The horse was a fleet one; he darted onward like an arrow. Ten minutes brought him to Bracken Hollow. There was no wind, but the old house was like tinder, and shrivelled up at once. It looked all one sheet of fire as he threw himself off the horse and rushed towards it.

There was a crowd collected, but the fire engines had not yet arrived. Little use their coming now. At the instant he appeared old Hannah came rushing headlong out.

"Save him for Heaven's sake!" she cried, "if ye be men will ye stand there and see a fellow creature burned to death before your eyes? I've lost the key of *her* room. Come—come—and burst open the door."

"What is it, Hannah?" called Henry Otis; "where is Dantree and Mrs. Harman?"

"Oh, thank Heaven you're here! Mrs. Harman is locked up in her room now and I can't find the key. Come and break it open for the Lord's sake. And *he* is I don't know where—no one has ever seen him yet."

"He has made his escape, no doubt. Stand aside, Hannah, or the woman will be burned to death."

There was an axe in the porch. He seized it and rushed headlong through flames and smoke towards Mrs. Harman's room. Her ringing screams broke over everything now. He struck at the door with all his might, but it was strong and resisted. "Stand from the door," he shouted to her within, "and be quiet; I will save you." He struck it again and again; it yielded to the fifth blow, and went crashing into the room. She was standing, in spite of his warning, directly opposite; it struck her heavily and felled her to the floor. He sprung in and drew her from beneath. The sharp angle of the oak door had struck her on the head near the temple; a great stream of blood was pouring over her face as he lifted her. The fire was already surging through the open door. He bowed his head over her, and with his burden rushed out of the doomed house.

He laid her on the ground senseless, bleeding. As he did so a mighty shout arose, then died away in a low moan of horror. Far up on the leads of the blazing building, far beyond all human aid, appeared a wild figure—the figure of a young man—with dark streaming hair, white face, and black, maniac eyes. It was Gaston Dantree.

The flames shot lurid and crimson up around him, higher than his head. His wild, mad cries of exultation rang shrilly out—his laughter curdled the blood of the listeners. "Ha! ha!" they heard him shout. "I told her I'd do it, and I've done it. Here's a fire, and I'm free, I'm free, I'm free!"

The red flames, the black smoke, hid him from their view; then with a dreadful roar the fire leaped up higher than ever,

and the roof fell in with a crash. The strongest, the hardest there, turned away and covered their eyes, sick with horror.

Six years before, Gaston Dantree had shuddered with vague nameless fear as he first looked on Bracken Hollow. That presentiment was fulfilled—strangely—terribly. For five years Bracken Hollow had been his prison !—this fearful August evening it was his grave !

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### "NOT I, BUT FATE, HATH DEALT THIS BLOW."

TWELVE ! by the steeple of Castleford High street ; twelve ! by the loud-voiced clock of the Scarswood stables. In the intense, sultry silence of the August night, the sharp, metallic strokes came even into that upper chamber of the Silver Rose, where, upon the big, curtained, old-fashioned four-poster in which Mrs. Vavasor and Rose O'Donnell had both slept, Harriet Harman lay dying.

Dying ! No earthly aid could reach her now. The blow of the heavy, iron-studded door had done its work. Doctor Graves went into learned medical details of the injury done the brain, and out of that obscure detail one terrible fact stood clear—she was dying ! Katherine had spared her, and in that very hour Death had sealed her for his own. Her life of sin, of plotting, of all evil and wrong-doing was rapidly drawing to a close ; the midnight hour booming solemnly through the quiet town, was ushering in the eternal night for her.

A smouldering heap of charred and burning ruins was all that remained of Bracken Hollow. To-morrow, among the débris, search would be instituted for the bones of the wretched victim of his own insanity. It had been his mania from the first to escape. Dozens of times he had attempted to fire the house, and old Hannah's constant vigilance had baffled him. Busied with the care of Mrs. Harman, he had been overlooked that day, and the result was his escape from his room, and the consummation of his purpose. The house was enveloped in flames before Hannah was aware. She had lain down to take a nap, and it was the cry of fire, and its dull roar around, that awoke

her. Bewildered by sleep and fear, she lost all presence of mind, forgot her two charges, and rushed forth. What she had done with the key of her latest prisoner's room she could not recollect; the breaking in and fall of the door did the rest.

They were all at the Silver Rose—Henry Otis, old Hannah, Lord Ruysland, and—Lady Cecil Clive. She had glided in among them an hour before—a gray ashen pallor on her face, a deep strange horror in her eyes, but calm beyond all telling; she walked alone from Scarswood; she had heard every word of Henry Otis's interview with the earl; she had neither fainted nor fallen; she had only sat down on a primrose knoll, feeling stunned and stupid. In that state she saw Mr. Otis mount the groom's horse and dash away like a madman; she had heard her father call his, and dash after; she saw the red light in the sky, and knew in a vague, dreamy sort of way, that it was a fire. And then her mind, without any volition of her own, went back and repeated over and over the strange words this strange man had said:

"Lady Cecil Clive is not your daughter—her name is Kath erine Harman. The children were changed at nurse—*your* daughter was Katherine Dangerfield."

"Katherine Dangerfield!" She repeated the name vaguely, pulling the primroses and mechanically arranging them in a bouquet. She felt no pain—no terror—no disbelief—only that stunned numbness. And still her mind persistently took up the tale and repeated it. "Not Lord Ruysland's daughter!—whose, then, was she? This Mrs. Harman he spoke of had been the nurse—and the nurse had given Lord Ruysland her own child. If so, then Mrs. Harman must be her mother. The thread of thought broke here. She arranged the primroses in a different fashion, twisting a blade of grass about the stems. Then like a flash memory pinioned her thoughts. Her mother! Her mother, a guilty, lost woman, and she—she not Lord Ruysland's daughter, the upstart usurper of another's rights.

The flowers dropped from her fingers, she started to her feet with a low, wailing cry. No more merciful apathy, no more stupor of mind. Clear as the crimson light yonder in the twilight sky the whole truth burst upon her. She was not Lord Ruysland's daughter—she was a usurper, and as such about to be shown to the world—no peeress of England, but the child of a guilty, designing servant woman.

She staggered as she stood, and grasped the branch of a tree. Her hands flew up and covered her face—one heart-broken sob

broke from her. She was very proud—sweet, gentle, gracious, all womanly she was, but even that sweet graciousness arose out of her pride. The daughter of a "belted earl" can afford to wear a smile for all less-favored mortals. She had been intensely proud of the name and rank she bore—of the noble line of ancestry stretching back to the Norman William; every stone, every tree around dear, old, ivied Clive Court, she loved like living things. Her very pride had made her accept what had galled that pride most—the formal offer of Sir Arthur Tregenna. He bore a name as old, nay older, than her own; the Tregennas had been barons and warriors in the reign of Edward the Confessor—the old glory of the house of Ruysland would be restored by this alliance. Had the man she loved asked her to be his wife, to go with him and share his poverty and obscurity—the chances are, loving him with a desperate, passionate love as she did, she might still have refused him. And now!

Her hands dropped from before her face—she stood cold, and white, and still. It was the righteous punishment of such pride as hers, such selfishness—such an outrage on all that was best and most womanly within her. Of all the men the world held, she loved but one; handsomer, nobler, more talented, had asked her to be their wife, but her heart had been like a stone to all. Redmond O'Donnell she had loved from the first. Redmond O'Donnell she would love until she died, And with heart full to overflowing with that passionate love, she had yet been ready to become the wife of another man. That man's pride of birth and station was equal to her own—what could he say to this?

"Fire—fire!" The servants were echoing the cry and rushing to the highest points, where they could see it best. It was nothing to her; she drew back behind the tree, and stood looking blankly, blindly before her. The child of a servant! a usurper! The world seemed rocking under her feet—the trees swimming round. Why had she not died before the truth was told? The night fell—the dew with it; she still stood there, heedless. She heard with preternatural distinctness the loud contending voices of the servants announcing the whereabouts of the fire. . The servants! It came to her that she should be one of them—that her birthright had been the servants' hall, not the drawing-room. Strangely enough she had never thought of doubting—she had seen Henry Otis' face—heard his voice, and felt, she knew not how, that he had told the truth.

Presently came a messenger rushing breathless from the town, full of the exciting news. Bracken Hollow was burned to the ground; a man, nobody knew who—burned to death with it, and a woman killed. They had taken the woman to the Silver Rose; she was not quite dead yet, it seemed, and my lord had gone after her, and was there now. The woman's name had leaked out somehow—it was Mrs. Harman.

Mrs. Harman! Her mother! It flashed upon her what Mr. Otis had said—Mrs. Harman had been imprisoned at Bracken Hollow to confess the truth, and now lay dying at the Silver Rose. Her mother! Guilty or not—lost, wretched, abandoned—still her mother. She started up—all stupor, all pride gone forever. She walked to the house—ran up to her own room—threw off her light muslin and costly laces, replaced them by a dress of dark gray, a summer shawl and hat. Then five minutes after was walking rapidly toward the town. She had told no one, Ginevra was absorbed in her own troubles, and there was no time for explanations. An hour before midnight she reached the Silver Rose.

A crowd of the town people were still gathered excitedly before it. A man burned to death—a woman killed—Bracken Hollow in ashes—not often was Castleford so exercised as this. And the dying woman must be somebody of importance, since my lord himself refused to leave the inn until her fate was one way or other decided.

They fell back wondering and respectful as Lady Cecil Clive drew near. Were they asleep or awake? Lord Ruysland's only daughter, alone and on foot, in Castleford at this hour. She passed through them all—never seeing them—seeing nothing, it seemed. The soft hazel eyes had a blind, sightless, sleep-waking sort of stare—her face was all drawn and white. In the passage she came face to face with the landlord. The dark, solemn eyes looked at him.

"Lord Ruysland is here," the pale lips said, "take me to him."

The man drew back a step—that nameless something in her colorless face terrified him.

"Take me to him," she repeated, "at once."

He bowed low and led the way. *Who* was the dying woman upstairs, that Lord Ruysland and his daughter should trouble themselves like this? He had not seen her face—probably would not have recalled it if he had. His lordship was not in the sick chamber, but in the little parlor adjoining—the little

parlor, where, one other night, six years before, Sir John Dangerfield's adopted daughter had waited to see Mrs. Vavasor. He was walking very slowly and softly up and down, his brow knit with a reflective frown—one white, slender hand thrust inside his coat. He looked up, and saw, without warning of any sort, Cecil. He absolutely recoiled—the sight of her, at that hour, in this place, and wearing *that* face, so startled him that for a second's time he half doubted if it were not her wraith.

"Queenie!" he gasped.

"Yes, papa—Queenie." She came forward and stood before him. "I was in the grounds," she continued, with perfect abruptness, "very near you, when Mr. Otis came and told you his story. I heard it all. It is true, I suppose, papa?"

He stood silent—speechless—looking at her in wonder and doubt.

"It is true, I suppose?" she repeated.

"What is true?"

"That I am not your daughter—that Katherine Dangerfield was. That I am the daughter of the woman dying in that room."

He was a man ordinarily very chary of caresses, but he was fond of the girl he had believed his daughter—he was fond of her still. Her beauty and her elegance had gratified his pride; her gentle, tender, winning ways had won his heart—or, at least, as much heart as that noble lord had to win. He took her in his arms now and kissed her.

"My dear," he said very gently, "I hope you know me well enough to be sure that, whether it is true or false, you will still be the same to me—the daughter I love and am proud of. I wish you need never have heard it; but, since it *must* come, I am thankful I am not the one to break it to you. It is a very terrible and shocking affair from first to last; I feel almost too stunned to realize it yet."

"It is perfectly true, then?"

"Well—yes, Queenie—I am afraid it is."

Had, all unknown to herself, some dim, shadowy hope still lingered in her breast that it might not be true? The sharpest pang she had felt yet pierced her as she heard his quiet words. With a sort of gasp her head fell on his shoulder and lay there.

"My poor little Queenie," he said, tenderly, "it is hard on you. Confound Otis! Why the devil couldn't he keep the nefarious story to himself? *I* was satisfied—where ignorance is bliss 'twere folly to be wise. *You* are the only daughter I want, and the other poor girl is dead—can't do her any good

now. But remember, Queenie, whatever comes of it, I look upon you still as my daughter—all the Otises and Harmans on earth shall not separate you and me. As Sir Arthur Tregenna's wife we can afford to despise their malice."

She shivered slightly at the sound of that name—then she lifted her head and drew herself away from him.

"Papa," she said, "you know why I have come here. If—I mean since she is my mother—I must see her. Oh, papa, I *must!* She has done a terrible wrong, but she is dying, and—" the agony within her broke into a wailing sob here—"I can't believe it—I can't—unless I hear it from her own lips. Take me to her, papa—please."

"I doubt if she will ever speak to any one in this world again—still the doctors say she may. Graves and Otis are with her. I'll ask them if they'll admit you."

He tapped at the door.

The pale face of Henry Otis looked out. As his eyes fell on, the tall, slender, elegant figure of the young lady, even he shrank.

"My daughter is here," the earl said coldly. "She knows all. She wishes to see Mrs. Harman, to hear, if it be possible for Mrs. Harman to speak—confirmation of your story from her lips. I think even you will allow, Mr. Otis, this is no more than her right."

"It is her right," Henry Otis said calmly.

He bowed to the queenly form and lovely face, and held the door wide for her to pass.

"You, too, my lord," he said. "She is dying, but she is conscious, and she has spoken. I must beg," he looked at Lady Cecil, "that you will be very quiet. A moment's excitement would be fatal."

She bowed her head and glided to the bedside. In the dim light of the shaded lamp she looked down upon the dying face. Even to her inexperienced eyes the dread seal of death lay there—the faint breathing was not audible, the eyes were closed—the fingers moved a little, plucking at the sheet. Opposite stood Dr. Graves holding her pulse in one hand—his watch in the other. Lord Ruysland followed and stood beside his daughter. Henry Otis bent over her and spoke.

"Mrs. Harman, Lord Ruysland is here. Can you speak to him?"

The eyelids fluttered—lifted—the great dark eyes looked up out of the rigid face, and fixed at once upon the earl's.

"Harriet," he said, and at the sound of the old name the dying face lit. "You know me, do you not?"

"Yes," very faintly the word came; "my lord, I—know you. I am sorry—" the whisper died away.

He bent close above her.

"Listen, Harriet—speak if you can—tell the truth now. Is Henry Otis' story true? Was it your child—your own—you gave me twenty years ago, or mine?"

"It was *mine*—I will swear it—if you like. I kept yours. I hated my lady. I swore revenge. She parted me from Lionel. Lionel! Lionel!" Her face lit again—the old love of her youth came back! The old love! mighty beyond all earthly passion, mighty to break prison bars, to compass the earth, to cross oceans, to endure in the very throes of death.

Lord Ruysland bent closer and took her hand.

"Look, Harriet," he said; "look at this face beside me. It is the child you gave me—that I love. Tell me again, as God hears and will judge you, is she yours or mine?"

The dark eyes turned upon the lovely, youthful face. She sank on her knees, and came very near that dying face.

"She is—mine—as God hears and will judge me—mine, Katherine Harman. Yours I gave to Sir John Dangerfield. Her grave is in Castleford Churchyard, and I saw her—saw her—two nights ago."

Lord Ruysland looked at Henry Otis.

"She saw Helen Herncastle," Henry Otis answered, with rigidly compressed lips.

"I did you great wrong," the dying lips whispered again—the dying eyes turning once more to the earl. The sight of her child seemed to wake no emotion whatever within her. "I hated my lady—I swore revenge—and I took it. I kept her child. She parted me from Lionel. He loved me—Lionel! Lionel!"

The faintly whispering voice died away—she never spoke again. Lady Cecil's face lay buried in her hands—on the others dead silence fell. The eyes closed, a spasm shook her from head to foot. "*Lionel*," the lips seemed to form once, then there was a moment's quiet, a strong shiver, and with it the last flicker of the lamp went out. And death stood in the midst of them.

"Come away, my darling," the earl whispered tenderly in Lady Cecil's ear.

Two sightless eyes look up at him, blind with dumb misery—

then with a gasp the tension that had held her up so long gave way. She fell back fainting in his arms.

---

The blinds were closed—a solemn hush lay over the house. In the parlor of the Silver Rose two coffins stood on tressels. In one the body of Harriet Harman lay—in the other, what they had found in the ruins of Bracken Hollow.

It was late in the afternoon of the following day. Over Scarswood Park summer silence and summer beauty reigned. The fish-pond and fountains flashed like jewels in the sunshine-turfy lanes, emerald green—white, pink, and crimson August roses nodded their fragrant heads in the sultry heat. The stone terraces—the great urns were burnished like silver, the leaves of the copper beeches were blood-red rubies, and long lances of light went slanting in amid the waving greenery of fern. The peacock strutted unadmired in the sun, bees boomed, grasshoppers chirped, but no living thing was to be seen around the grand old mansion. Everywhere, within and without, Sabbath silence reigned.

The Earl of Ruysland was alone in the solitude and splendor of the drawing-rooms, his reflection in the many mirrors meeting him at every turn, like a black-robed ghost. He was walking up and down as Lady Cecil had found him last night—the same thoughtful frown on his brow, the same exasperated thought still uppermost.

"Why the deuce couldn't Otis have minded his business and let things alone? From all I have heard of the *other one*," he resumed, "I was much better off without her. She was neither handsome nor amiable; she was passionate, headstrong, willful, disobedient. Cecil is none of these things; she has been a creditable daughter from first to last. And they say blood tells. Why need this officious fool, this meddlesome Otis, go raking up the unpleasant truth? The other is dead—it can't benefit her. Cecil is alive, and it will make her wretched all the rest of her life, poor child, and what—*what* will Sir Arthur say? One consolation is, he is the soul incarnate of honor: he won't draw back, if I know him at all; I believe he will only press his suit the harder. So poor Queenie is provided for in any case. Egad! I didn't know how fond I was of her before! It's a very unpleasant business from first to last, and I could see Otis at the bottom of the bottomless pit with pleasure. It must be hushed up—at any price, it must be hushed up—for my sake, for my late wife's, for poor Queenie's, for Sir

Arthur's. The devil take Otis! *what* was the fool's motive, I wonder? What—what if that diabolical Miss Herncastle has had something to do with this, too? On my life, she has! Was there ever an infernal piece of mischief let loose on the earth yet, without the woman being the instigator? I believe," —he struck his hands together—"it is Miss Herncastle's handiwork from first to last. Well, Soames, what now?"

"The post, my lord—letters for your lordship."

The bowing Soames placed a silver salver, on which half a dozen letters were arranged, before his lordship, and backed from the room.

There were one or two for Lady Cecil—one from Sir Arthur Tregenna—two for Lady Dangerfield, and two for himself. The first of these letters was on business from his solicitor, the other in a hand that was new to him. He broke it open. It was lengthy. He glanced at the name—"Redmond O'Donnell."

"Now *what* does O'Donnell mean, by making me wade through twelve closely written pages?" his lordship said in an aggrieved tone. "How little consideration some people have for the feelings of their fellow-beings! I'll look over it at least, I suppose."

He adjusted his eye-glass, smoothed out the pages, and glanced through them. "Miss Herncastle"—"Katherine Dangerfield" —what did it mean? Everywhere those two names!

His lassitude vanished. He began at the beginning, and slowly and carefully read the letter through. His face changed as it had not changed when Otis first broke to him the news that his daughter was not his daughter. Goodness above! what was this? Katherine Dangerfield not dead! Katherine Dangerfield and Miss Herncastle one and the same! Katherine Dangerfield his daughter! Miss Herncastle, whom he had hunted down, whom he had employed a detective to track, whom he had driven from Scarswood like a felon—Katherine Dangerfield and Miss Herncastle *one!* He turned sick. He laid down the letter—a creeping feeling of faintness upon him—and waited. The soft breeze of the summer's evening blew on his face. A carafe of ice-water stood on a table. He drank a glass, took a turn about the room, sat down suddenly, and read the letter over again.

It was plainly there—all the proofs, one after another; no doubting—no disputing now. She had not died; Otis knew it and had not told him this. He recalled the picture of Lionel Cardinell in the possession of the governess, her interest in the

story, the strong likeness to his dead wife that had struck him the first time he saw her. The ghost and the resemblance to Katherine Dangerfield were explained now. A wig and dyed eyebrows were all the disguises she had assumed. What a bold game she had played! And Tregenna had fallen in love with her, and *he* had separated them—forced him to propose to Harriet Harman's daughter. *His* daughter lived—had relented at the eleventh hour—had burned the confession—returned Sir Peter his money— renounced her retribution—and gone into the world alone and unaided to fight the bitter battle of life.

For once in his life, cynicism, philosophy, Voltairism fell from the Earl of Ruysland ; for once all the creeds of his training and his order were powerless to help him bear this. Had Redmond O'Donnell ever asked for revenge—had he seen him then—even he might have been amply satisfied. He covered his eyes with his hand—struck to the very soul.

"Oh God!" he cried, "this is the hardest to bear of all!"

---

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### HOW IT ENDED.

IT was a brilliant April day.

That never-to-be-forgotten August, and all the bright summer, the yellow autumn, the chill gray winter months had worn away. March had howled and blustered through the leafless trees of Scarswood Park, and now April, soft and sunny, smiling and showering, was here, clothing all the land in living green.

The bright afternoon was at its brightest, as Lady Cecil Clive took her seat in a rustic chair under the King's Oak, her sketch-book in her lap, the flickering lines of yellow light slanting on her uncovered head. Pearl and Pansy played at hide-and-seek along the terraces and through the trees. Lady Dangerfield, in the drawing-room, played waltzes on the piano, and Lady Cecil let book and pencils fall listlessly and sat "lost in memory's mazes."

Eight months had passed and gone since that August day when Sir Arthur Tregenna had stood by her side at yonder sunny boudoir window and asked her to be his wife. Eight

months since, in the hotel parlor, he had pleaded with her to marry him—pleaded while all his heart was another's—pleaded, and in vain.

They had met but once since then, and then how differently.

He had gone abroad, and resumed his wandering life. Before going, however, he had called upon Katherine—a most unsatisfactory and embarrassing meeting for both. *Why* he had gone he could hardly have told; some "spirit in his feet" —some spirit in his heart. He went because he *could not* leave England for years without seeing her. There was very little to say on either side—a mutual restraint held them—the interview had been silent and short. He looked into the pale, grave, thoughtful face, into the sad, large eyes, and knew, more strongly than he had ever known it before, that this woman, of all the women on earth, was the only one he ever had or ever would love.

And knowing it he had left her. Was it not wisest? Earl Ruysland's daughter she might be, injured beyond all reparation she might be, but also, she had been an adventuress none the less. He was *very* proud—proud of his old lineage, his spotless name, his unstained descent. No whisper had ever been breathed against the women of his race; should he be the first to blot their escutcheon? She had suffered greatly, but also she had sinned. She had plotted and worked for revenge. She had been an actress. She had been at the very altar, the bride of a worthless wretch. She had stooped to play upon that superstitious Sir Peter's fears—to play the ghost. She had acted a lie, acted a doubly deceitful part, gone in male attire to the masquerade, personated Frankland, and separated man and wife. And last, and worst of all in this dark and deadly summing up of crime, she had palmed herself off again, of course in male attire, as Gaston Dantree, and with the coolness and skill of a Homburg gambler, won from the baronet his money.

All this she had done. He might be in love, but he was not blind—he summed up the evidence mercilessly against her. True, at the eleventh hour she had striven to repair and atone; but can *any* reparation or atonement ever wash out guilt on earth? She had been great even in her wrong-doing; but such a woman as this was no wife for him. And he turned his back resolutely upon England and her, and went wandering over the world, striving to forget.

But forgetfulness would not come. "How is it under our control to love or not to love?" He could not banish her memory, or the love with which she had inspired him, from his

heart. The pale, wistful face, the dark, sad eyes followed him, haunted him, wherever he went. And just three months after his departure, there came to Miss Dangerfield a letter, post-marked Constantinople, pouring forth all his doubts, all his scruples, all his love—a full confession. He could not be happy without her—would she be his wife?

Her answer was a refusal.

"I would indeed be unworthy the great compliment you pay me," she wrote, "if I accepted your generous offer. My life has gone wrong from first to last; all the years that are to come will be too few for atonement. Sir Arthur Tregenna's wife must be above reproach. No one in the future shall lift the finger of scorn, and say the last of a noble line disgraced it by marrying *me*. It is utterly impossible, Sir Arthur, that I can be your wife. But the knowledge that I once won a heart so true, so noble, will brighten all my life."

He had written to her again, and she had answered, gently, but with unflinching resolution. Again he wrote, again she replied, and the correspondence went on between them. During that winter long letters from every city in Europe came to the little cottage of Henry Otis. And so—they hardly knew how—they grew to understand one another as they might never have done else. She learned, as the months went by, to look for the coming of those pleasant white-winged messengers as gleams of sunshine in her sober, drab-colored life. As for him—how eagerly Sir Arthur Tregenna received and welcomed the replies, only Sir Arthur Tregenna knew.

For the rest, she had already atoned in great measure for the evil of the past. Her letter to Sir Peter, her humility, her forgiveness, had somehow made its way even to his shrivelled, icy heart. The unutterable relief of knowing she was not dead, that the ghost was no ghost, of receiving intact all his money back, was so great, that he was ready to promise anything, do anything. She asked but one boon; that he would forgive and take back his wife. The blame of the masked ball was all hers—hers alone. Lady Dangerfield would never have gone but for her urging. He read it, his dried-up little heart softening wonderfully for the time. He finished it, he ordered his charger, he rode forth to Scarswood and his wife. What that conjugal meeting was like the world is not destined to know. Sir Peter was relenting but dignified, very dignified, and my lady, hysterical, frightened, ready to eat humble pie to any extent, resigned the reins of power at once and forever. The calumet of peace was smoked—a treaty of peace issued on

sundry conditions. One was that the town house was to be leased; no more London seasons, no more a box at both houses; Scarswood and her husband were to be brightened by her presence the year round. And Jasper Frankland was NEVER to come down again. Indeed the less company the Park saw, Sir Peter signified, the better its sovereign lord and master would like it.

Lord Ruysland had gone abroad. There was always a little money to be picked up at Baden-Baden and Homburg; living was cheap. To Baden and Homburg the noble earl went, and entered the lists of "Birds of prey." For Cecil, her home was still at Scarswood—in the capacity of governess, *vice* Miss Herncastle, resigned.

"You will want a governess for Pearl and Pansy, you say, Ginevra," she said quietly, the day preceding her father's departure. "Take me."

"Queenie!" my lady cried. "You?"

The discovery of Queenie's parentage had made no change in Ginevra's affections. If there was one true, pure, womanly feeling in her hard, worldly, selfish heart, it was for *La Reine Blanche*.

"Yes—I," Lady Cecil answered steadily. "I ought to be capable—papa, at least, spared no expense on my education. I have been like the lilies of the field long enough—I have toiled not, neither have I spun. The time has come for both. Papa is penniless, an earl and a pauper; every rood of land he once owned is mortgaged past all redemption. What would you have me do? Live on your and Sir Peter's bounty? I shrink miserably from the thought of going out among strangers, and yet, if you refuse, there is no other alternative. I love the children, they me, and I will conscientiously do my best for them. As I have neither testimonials nor references," smiling a little sadly, "I shall not demand a *very* high salary. If you must engage some one, I should prefer your engaging me. Consult Sir Peter, and let me know."

"But, Queenie—good Heaven! what will Sir Arthur—"

"Sir Arthur has nothing whatever to do with me or my actions from henceforth. I thought I had explained all that already. My mind is made up. I shall earn my own living somehow. Oh, Ginevra, when we think of *her*, of what she ought to be, of all I have been forced to usurp, need I blush to work?"

The result was, that Lady Cecil Clive was engaged as governess to Lady Dangerfield's children.

"Only remember, Queenie, I won't have the world know it," Ginevra said; "it is enough for our gossiping neighbors, that

you have taken a whim to instruct Pansy and Pearl. I am unspeakably glad you are going to remain. I should die." Drearily this. "Yes, Queenie, die, shut up alone in a dismal country house, year in, year out, with Sir Peter Dangerfield."

So it was settled, and the new life begun. The months went by, slowly and heavily enough, but they went, and the Earl of Ruysland's daughter was fairly earning her own living.

In London, Katherine was busy too. She had as many music pupils as she could attend, and she worked indefatigably. Her home in the Otis cottage was a peaceful—a pleasant one—no mother could have loved her more tenderly than Mrs. Otis, no brother half so well as Henry Otis. She had her foreign letters too, growing strangely precious, and as winter warmed into spring there was a sudden and most unlooked-for visit from their writer.

"In the spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love." Well not quite that, perhaps—Sir Arthur's thoughts turned lightly upon few things—least of all that. A great longing to see her, to hear her, had come upon him far off in Africa. All one white Eastern night he lay awake watching the yellow stars through the opening of his tent and thinking of her. Next morning he started for England. All the rest—his journeyings by sea and land—was but a feverish dream, until the reality came, and he was standing in the little cottage parlor, holding her hand, and looking into the sweet, gravely thoughtful eyes. Was she growing beautiful he wondered, was it only the blindness and glamour of love, or—and this was most likely—was it the serene sweetness of an altered life shining through the deep gray eyes?

Again he pleaded—again she refused.

"It cannot be—it cannot! Oh, believe it, and forget me! It is impossible that I, after all that is past, can ever marry."

"Always the past!" he cried, bitterly. "Does all your suffering, all your wrongs, all your atonement, go for nothing? If I can forget the past, Katherine, surely you may."

"You forget it now. In the years to come you may be forced to remember it. And, as your wife, I don't think I could bear that."

"Am I a scoundrel in your eyes?" he cried out, a passion in his voice very new there, "that, having won you for my wife, I should ever give you cause to repent it?"

"I did not mean that. I think nothing of you but what is generous and noble. If you repented I know well I should

never see it, if you could help it. But I think I should see it for all that. She who was once Helen Herncastle, can never be Lady Tregenna."

He turned away from her—such keen disappointment, such bitter pain, written in his face, that her heart relented. She liked him so much—so much that she began to wonder if the liking were not loving. It was hardly possible such noble, disinterested, enduring love as his should not beget love.

"Oh, forgive me," she penitently cried, "if I have wounded you! Indeed I did not mean it! I *do* like you; but it is for your good, your happiness, I speak. Cannot you see that?"

"I can see nothing but that without you my life will all go wrong—will be utterly miserable. Katherine, I love you! What more can I say? Love me in return, and be my wife!"

He held out his arms. For a moment she stood irresolute—longing, yet dreading to go, for his sake.

"Come to me!" he pleaded—"my bride! my wife! Forget the past has ever been—it shall never come between us! Come, and make the happiness of my life!"

And then, as he enfolded her, and her head fell on his shoulder, Katherine knew that peace had found her out at last.

She told him all her story—every detail of her life, painting what was dark in its darkest colors. He should never marry her—not knowing the worst. Among the rest, of that strange fancy for Redmond O'Donnell.

"I don't pretend to understand it," she said. "It may have been part of the fatality that has been at work from the first to care for the two men, of all men, who could never care for me—Gaston Dantree and Redmond O'Donnell. The first was but a foolish girl's foolish admiration for a handsome face; the last—ah! well, it *might* have ripened into love, but it is gone now—gone forever. I would never give you or any man on earth my hand, if my heart might not go with it. You do me great honor, Sir Arthur Tregenna, in asking me to be your wife; and as you trust me, so you will find me—your loving and faithful wife to the end."

Three weeks later, in the lovely April weather, Sir Arthur Tregenna, Bart., and Miss Katherine Dangerfield, were quietly married in London. Married from Henry Otis' cottage, in a quiet church in the neighborhood. There was but one bridesmaid—Lady Cecil Clive. And in her white robes, her gossamer veil, her bridal blossoms, the sweet, tender, tremulous happiness of her face, Katherine was lovely. Lord Ruysland gave away the bride. He had come express from Baden-Baden

for the purpose. And the great Cornish baronet was his son-in-law at last.

There was a breakfast at the cottage, and Mrs Otis cried a great deal. If Henry Otis felt, in his heart of hearts, like keeping her company, no one there discovered it. He bore it with philosophy, but then he had vowed to get the better of his ill starred passion, and he was a man, whether to himself or others, to keep his word.

Immediately after the ceremony, the "happy pair," (words of bitter satire often—words true in the highest sense here,) started for a prolonged Continental tour. Lord Ruysland went back to Germany. Lady Cecil returned to Scarswood, to my lady's dreary wailings, to Sir Peter's prosy companionship, to the weary toil of training the obstreperous twins in the rudiments of English, French, music, and drawing. Toil, dreary beyond all telling, but bravely, thoroughly, and cheerfully done. If Redmond O'Donnell's bronzed, somber face, and stern blue eyes came back to her from over the sea a hundred times a day, his name never once passed her lips.

She sits, this April afternoon, under the hoary oak, her hands playing listlessly with her pencils, the tender green of earth, the tender blue of sky, the sunlit loveliness of both unseen. She sits thinking—she is far away in the past—so far that she wakes at last with a start. Thinking is profitless work, and presently, with a long, tired sigh, she takes up her pencils and Bristol board and begins to work. But thought follows her even here—the landscape she would sketch grows blurred before her eyes, and it is a face she draws—a face, every expression, every outline of which is graven on her heart.

She hears a footstep approaching up the avenue, but no one in whom she is the least interested ever comes to Scarswood, so she does not look up. She goes on with her work, so absorbed that she forgets all about the intruder. He sees her afar off, and pauses a moment to look at her. The afternoon sunshine gilds the sweet, fair, drooping face, and kindles into a halo the bronze hair. Slowly he draws nearer, stepping on the grass that he may not disturb her. He comes close—so close that he can look over her shoulder and see what it is that holds her so absorbed. Then he speaks, close beside her, and very coolly:

"If you intend that for a fancy face, Lady Cecil, I have nothing to say. If for a portrait, then I must tell you it is most egregiously flattered."

She starts up with a cry; for it is a likeness of Redmond

O'Donnell she is drawing, and it is Redmond O'Donnell himself who stands smiling before her.

"Good day to you, Lady Cecil"—he lifts his hat as though they had parted yesterday, and holds out his hand—"I am afraid I have startled you; but not so greatly, I hope, that you cannot shake hands. Ah! thanks!" As scarcely knowing what she does she lays four cold fingers in his. "I thought at first you meant to refuse. And how have you been since I saw you last?" He takes a seat in the rustic chair, which accommodates three, and she sinks down, scarcely knowing whether she is asleep or awake, beside him. Her heart is throbbing so fast that for a moment she turns giddy and faint. She has not spoken a word—she does not try to speak now. "Well," O'Donnell says, in the same cool tone, "you *don't* look over-glad to see me, I must say. This is what comes of giving one's friends a pleasant surprise. And I flattered myself you had sufficient friendly interest in me, or if not, common politeness enough at least, to say you were glad to see me back."

"I *am* glad." Her voice is not steady—she quivers as she sits. "But—it was so sudden. I am nervous, I suppose, and little things startle me." She lays her hand on her heart to still its tumultuous beatings, and looks up at him for the first time. "You are the last person I expected to see. I thought you were at Algiers."

"The last person we expect to see is very often the first person we *do* see," O'Donnell answered, still eminently self-possessed. "I haven't been at Algiers, and I'm not going. I shall turn my sword into a scythe, my rifle into a plowshare, and go in for peace, respectability, and pastoral life. I have been out in New Orleans."

"In New Orleans?"

"Yes. I received a telegram from my grandfather after leaving here, telling me his wife and son were dead, and requesting me to bring Rose back. We went. We have been there ever since."

She was beginning to recover now. She drew a little further from him, and began tracing figures in the grass with her white parasol.

"Your sister is well, I hope?"

"My sister is quite well, thank you."

"She remains in New Orleans with your grandfather?"

"She is in London, and my grandfather is dead."

"Indeed." She is strangely at a loss what to say, something very unusual with Lord Ruysland's high-bred daughter. "I

hope then we will see Miss O'Donnell down at Scarswood shortly."

"Well, yes. I suppose Rose will come. She is very anxious to see *you*. In fact, she wanted to accompany me on this occasion, but I objected."

"Objected! Why?"

"I preferred to come alone. Other people may be very anxious to see you as well as Rose—may they not? And you know I never like third persons during my interviews with you."

She still looks down at the emerald turf, still traces figures with her parasol. He looks at her, and there is silence.

"You have heard of Sir Arthur Tregenna's marriage?" she says at length with a sort of effort. Women are always the first to break these embarrassing pauses. "No doubt he sent you word?"

"He sent me no word—how could he? He thought with you I was in Algeria. Still I heard of it—from whom do you think? Our mutual friend, Charlie Delamere."

"Ah! Charlie," with a smile; "he knew your address then?"

"Yes—after six months of Louisiana, I grew sick for news of England and my friends. I did not care to write to any of those friends direct for sundry reasons, so I sent a line to Charlie. I got all the news I wished immediately—Sir Arthur's marriage among the rest. He's a fine fellow, and in spite of the Miss Herncastle episode, his wife suits him. She *suits* him—all is said in that, they will be happy."

"I hope so," she answered softly.

"Your father is in Germany, Lady Cecil?"

"He is always in Germany of late—he seems to make it his home. Poor papa!" A sigh.

"And you," the blue eyes that can be so keen, so hard, so steely, so tender, alternately, are watching her with a light she feels, but cannot meet. "And you still reside with your cousin and Sir Peter. I am glad, by the bye, that they are reconciled. Doesn't the life strike you as rather a dull one?"

"Not particularly. I hope I have common-sense enough to know life cannot be all sunshine and roses for any of us. Scarswood is always a pleasant place, and I am too busy to find much time for idle repinings. Work is a boon—I have found that out. I am the children's governess, now, you know. So," with an effort to change the subject, "you have given up all thoughts of Algiers. Lanty Lafferty will rejoice at that! How is Mr. Lafferty?"

"Very well, and strongly matrimonially inclined. He is

down with me, and gone to the Silver Rose to see his old sweetheart. I believe a marriage will follow in the fullness of time. And so you are governess to the twins—terrible drudgery, I should fancy—and practise drawing in the intervals. Let me have another look at my portrait—clever, perhaps, as a work of art, but, as I said before, absurdly flattered as a likeness. You do think of me then sometimes, Queenie?"

The old pet name! A faint rose-pink flush deepened all over the fair, pearly face.

"I think of all my friends—what an opinion you must have of my memory, and I have a private gallery of their portraits. Please give me my sketch back—it is easier for you to criticise than to do better."

"A rule which applies to all criticism, I fancy. I'll give you the sketch back on one condition—that I may give you myself with it!"

"Captain O'Donnell!"

"Lady Cecil!"

The faint carnation was vivid scarlet now. She started up, but he caught both her hands and held her. The bright blue eyes, full of piercing, laughing light, looked up into the startled brown ones. Not much fierceness—not much sternness there now.

"What do you mean, sir! Let me go. Here come the children—pray, let me go!"

"Let them come!" cries this reckless young Irishman. "Let all the world come, if it likes. I shall not let you go until you promise. You like me excessively—oh! it's of no use denying it—you know you do, but not one thousandth part as I like you. And I want you to marry me. It will not be so *very* much more stupid than vegetating at Scarswood and teaching the nine parts of speech to Pansy and Pearl. Come, Queenie! We have been in love with each other pretty nearly seven years. They say the certain cure for love is—matrimony. Let us try it."

"Captain O'Donnell, let me go."

"Not until you promise. Queenie, I mean it. I have come all the way from New Orleans to say this. I love you—be my wife. Since you can bear up under the drudgery of a governess' life, you can endure to be the wife of a poor man. The question is—will you try?"

"I would have tried it six years ago, if Redmond O'Donnell had given me the chance. I would have tried it eight months ago, if his pride had not stood between us. I am not afraid of pov-

erty—perhaps because I was born to it—poverty and servitude were my birthright. Does Captain O'Donnell forget princely blood flows in his veins, and in mine—that of a waiting-maid?"

"That is meant as a reproach. Well, my stiff-neckedness in the past deserves it. But think again, Queenie—how you have been brought up—that luxury has been the very breath you drew—think what marriage with a poor man means. Six stuffy rooms—one grimy maid-of-all-work—one silk dress a year—no carriage—no opera—no society—the beautiful and poetical of life a dream of the past. Think!"

"I do think. I think you want to talk me into saying no—you fear I may take you at your word. Very well, sir—I say it. I am deeply honored by your offer, and beg to decline."

He drew her to him—close, closer. If those innocent twins are anywhere in the visible horizon now, they stand strong chance of being amazed and scandalized.

"Queenie, my darling—whom I never hoped to hold, to kiss like this—you really love me well enough to endure poverty and obscurity for my sake. You will be my wife and never repent. You will go with me and resign everything?"

"Everything! Oh, Redmond! I shall have *you!*"

And then—the twins are drawing nearer—their howls can be heard through the trees, Lady Cecil has some consideration for their artless youth, if *Le Beau Chasseur* has none, and laughing, and blushing, and looking—oh! so lovely—withdraws to the extreme end of the rustic seat.

"No, Captain O'Donnell—not one inch nearer—I insist upon it! My hearing is excellent—any remarks you may have to make I can hear at this distance perfectly well. And the other performance is not necessary. Pearl and Pansy are coming, and you know the proverb—'Little pitchers have great ears.'"

"Confound Pearl and Pansy! Queenie, you are sure you will never repent marrying a penniless soldier of fortune!"

"I tell you I like poverty. How stupid some people are—forcing one to repeat the same thing over and over. I prefer it decidedly—yes, I do—don't look like that—I *do.*"

"Ah!" O'Donnell said, gravely, "I am sorry for that. It may be painful for you to hear, Lady Cecil, but—I have had a fortune left me!"

"Redmond!" starting up, indignantly. "A fortune!"

"Yes, my love—don't let your angry passions rise if you can help it—a fortune. M. De Lansac died three months ago, and divided his fortune equally between Rose and me. It was

a fortune of two million dollars. A pittance, perhaps, as compared with the inheritance of Sir Arthur Tregenna; but to poverty-loving, humble individuals like Lady Cecil Clive and Redmond O'Donnell, sufficient for the bread and cheese of life, a page in buttons, and *two* silk dresses per annum. My love! my love!"

Where is the distance between them *now?*—and the twins are standing petrified, open-mouthed and eyed, at what they behold not six yards off.

"I can give you wealth as well as love Thank God for the happiness He has given me at last!"

---

The light fades from the scenes and the faces we know—the hour has come to part. One by one they glide into the shadowy distance and are lost to you and me forever. Is any one who has followed their fortunes sorry to let them go, I wonder—to say forever farewell?

Take one last look, before the curtain falls, to rise no more. Of Sir Peter and Lady Dangerfield, dragging out their married, not mated, lives, in the grandeur and dullness of Scarswood. Of Lanty Lafferty, a married man, with "Shusan" for his wife, the prosperous proprietor of a "public." Of Henry Otis and his mother, prosperous in London, with Katherine and his hopeless love already a dream of the past. Of Squire Talbot, who hopes very soon to bring home a mistress to Morecambe—a mistress as yet known as Rose O'Donnell. Of Captain and Lady Cecil O'Donnell, happy beyond all telling of mine—happy in that perfect wedded love rarely found upon earth. And lastly, of Sir Arthur and Lady Tregenna, with the past but a dark, sad dream they never recall, loving each other, trusting each other, as great hearts and noble souls do love and trust. They are still abroad, in pleasant wandering through pleasant lands. One day they will return to Cornwall, and among all the mistresses that in the last four hundred years have ruled it in hoary old Tregenna, none will be more beloved, none more worthy of all love and honor, than she who was once Helen Herncastle. Her face floats before me as I write the words, noble, tender, womanly, peaceful, and happy, at last. Let the name that began this story end it—KATHERINE.

THE END.

1883. 1883.

# G. W. CARLETON & CO.

# NEW BOOKS

## AND NEW EDITIONS,

RECENTLY ISSUED BY

**G. W. CARLETON & CO., Publishers,**

**14 West 23d Street, New York.**

The Publishers, on receipt of price, will send any book on this Catalogue by mail, *postage free.*

All handsomely bound in cloth, with gilt backs suitable for libraries.

### Mary J. Holmes' Novels.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Tempest and Sunshine | $1 50 | Darkness and Daylight | $1 50 |
| English Orphans | 1 50 | Hugh Worthington | 1 50 |
| Homestead on the Hillside | 1 50 | Cameron Pride | 1 50 |
| 'Lena Rivers | 1 50 | Rose Mather | 1 50 |
| Meadow Brook | 1 50 | Ethelyn's Mistake | 1 50 |
| Dora Deane | 1 50 | Millbank | 1 50 |
| Cousin Maude | 1 50 | Edna Browning | 1 50 |
| Marian Grey | 1 50 | West Lawn | 1 50 |
| Edith Lyle | 1 50 | Mildred | 1 50 |
| Daisy Thornton | 1 50 | Forrest House | 1 50 |
| Chateau D'Or | 1 50 | Madeline (New) | 1 50 |
| Queenie Hetherton (New) | 1 50 | Christmas Stories—and portrait | 1 50 |

### Charles Dickens—25 Vols.—"Carleton's Edition."

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Pickwick and Catalogue | $1 50 | David Copperfield | $1 50 |
| Dombey and Son | 1 50 | Nicholas Nickleby | 1 50 |
| Bleak House | 1 50 | Little Dorrit | 1 50 |
| Martin Chuzzlewit | 1 50 | Our Mutual Friend | 1 50 |
| Barnaby Rudge—Edwin Drood | 1 50 | Curiosity Shop—Miscellaneous | 1 50 |
| Child's England—Miscellaneous | 1 50 | Sketches by Boz—Hard Times | 1 50 |
| Christmas Books—Two Cities | 1 50 | Great Expectations—Italy | 1 50 |
| Oliver Twist—Uncommercial | 1 50 | *Full Sets* in half calf bindings | 50 00 |

### Marion Harland's Novels.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Alone | $1 50 | At Last | $1 50 |
| Hidden Path | 1 50 | Sunnybank | 1 50 |
| Moss Side | 1 50 | Ruby's Husband | 1 50 |
| Nemesis | 1 50 | My Little Love | 1 50 |
| Miriam | 1 50 | True as Steel (New) | 1 50 |

### Augusta J. Evans' Novels.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Beulah | $1 75 | St. Elmo | $2 00 |
| Macaria | 1 75 | Vashti | 2 00 |
| Inez | 1 75 | Infelice (New) | 2 00 |

### Carleton's Popular Quotations.

| | |
|---|---|
| Carleton's New Hand-Book—Familiar Quotations, with their authorship | $1 50 |
| Carleton's Classical Dictionary—A Condensed Mythology for popular use. | 75 |

## May Agnes Fleming's Novels.

Guy Earlscourt's Wife.....$1 50
A Wonderful Woman..... 1 50
A Terrible Secret..... 1 50
A Mad Marriage..... 1 50
Norine's Revenge..... 1 50
One Night's Mystery..... 1 50
Kate Danton..... 1 50
Silent and True..... 1 50
Maude Percy's Secret...(New).. 1 50
Heir of Charlton.....$1 50
Carried by Storm..... 1 50
Lost for a Woman..... 1 50
A Wife's Tragedy..... 1 50
A Changed Heart..... 1 50
Pride and Passion..... 1 50
Sharing Her Crime..... 1 50
A Wronged Wife... (New)..... 1 50

## Allan Pinkerton's Works.

Expressmen and Detectives.....$1 50
Mollie Maguires and Detectives.. 1 50
Somnambulists and Detectives... 1 50
Claude Melnotte and Detectives.. 1 50
Criminal Reminiscences, etc.... 1 50
Rail-Road Forger, etc..... 1 50
Bank Robbers and Detectives.... 1 50
Gypsies and Detectives.....$1 50
Spiritualists and Detectives..... 1 50
Model Town and Detectives..... 1 50
Strikers, Communists, etc..... 1 50
Mississippi Outlaws, etc..... 1 50
Bucholz and Detectives..... 1 50
Burglar's Fate and Detectives.... 1 50

## Bertha Clay's Novels.

Thrown on the World .....$1 50
A Bitter Atonement..... 1 50
Love Works Wonders..... 1 50
Evelyn's Folly ..... 1 50
Under a Shadow ..... 1 50
Beyond Pardon.....(New)..... 1 50
A Woman's Temptation.....$1 50
Repented at Leisure..... 1 50
A Struggle for a Ring ..... 1 50
Lady Damer's Secret..... 1 50
Between Two Loves...New).... 1 50

## "New York Weekly" Series.

Brownie's Triumph—Sheldon....$1 50
The Forsaken Bride. do. ... 1 50
Earl Wayne's Nobility. do. ... 1 50
Lost, a Pearle— do. ... 1 50
Young Mrs. Charnleigh-Henshew 1 50
His Other Wife—Ashleigh..... 1 50
A Woman's Web—Maitland..... 1 50
Curse of Everleigh—Pierce.....$1 50
Peerless Cathleen—Agnew..... 1 50
Faithful Margaret—Ashmore .... 1 50
Nick Whiffles—Robinson ..... 1 50
Grinder Papers—Dallas..... 1 50
Lady Leonora—Conklin..... 1 50

## Miriam Coles Harris' Novels.

Rutledge.....$1 50
Frank Warrington..... 1 50
Louie's Last Term, St. Mary's.. 1 50
Missy..... 1 50
A Perfect Adonis ..... 1 50
The Sutherlands .....$1 50
St. Philips..... 1 50
Round Hearts for Children..... 1 50
Richard Vandermarck ..... 1 50
Happy-Go-Lucky....(New)... .. 1 50

## A. S. Roe's Select Stories.

True to the Last .....$1 50
The Star and the Cloud..... 1 50
How Could He Help it?..... 1 50
A Long Look Ahead .....$1 50
I've Been Thinking..... 1 50
To Love and to be Loved..... 1 50

## Julie P. Smith's Novels.

Widow Goldsmith's Daughter..$1 50
Chris and Otho..... 1 50
Ten Old Maids..... 1 50
Lucy..... 1 50
His Young Wife..... 1 50
The Widower... .....$1 50
The Married Belle..... 1 50
Courting and Farming..... 1 50
Kiss and be Friends..... 1 50
Blossom Bud... (New)..... 1 50

## Artemas Ward.

Complete Comic Writings—With Biography, Portrait and 50 illustrations....$1 50

## The Game of Whist.

Pole on Whist—The English standard work. With the "Portland Rules"...$ 75

## Victor Hugo's Great Novel.

Les Miserables—Translated from the French. The only complete edition.....$1 50

## Mrs. Hill's Cook Book.

Mrs. A. P. Hill's New Southern Cookery Book, and domestic receipts... $2 00

## Celia E. Gardner's Novels.

Stolen Waters. (In verse).....$1 50
Broken Dreams. do. ..... 1 50
Compensation. do. ..... 1 50
A Twisted Skein. do. ..... 1 50
Tested.....$1 50
Rich Medway..... 1 50
A Woman's Wiles..... 1 50
Terrace Roses..... 1 50

## Captain Mayne Reid's Works.

The Scalp Hunters.....$1 50
The Rifle Rangers..... 1 50
The War Trail..... 1 50
The Wood Rangers..... 1 50
The Wild Huntress..... 1 50
The White Chief .....$1 50
The Tiger Hunter..... 1 50
The Hunter's Feast..... 1 50
Wild Life ..... 1 50
Osceola, the Seminole..... 1 50

## Hand-Books of Society.

The Habits of Good Society—The nice points of taste and good manners....$1 00
The Art of Conversation—For those who wish to be agreeable talkers..... 1 00
The Arts of Writing, Reading and Speaking—For Self-Improvement.. ... 1 00
New Diamond Edition—The above three books in one volume—small type.... 1 50

## Josh Billings.

His Complete Writings—With Biography, Steel Portrait and 100 Illustrations.$2 00
Old Probability—Ten Comic Alminax, 1870 to 1879. In one volume, Illustrated. 1 50

## Charles Dickens.

Child's History of England—With *Historical Illustrations* for School use..$ 75
Parlor Table Album of Dickens' Illustrations—With descriptive text..... 1 50
Lord Bateman Ballad—Comic Notes by Dickens; Pictures by Cruikshank... 25

## Annie Edwardes' Novels.

Stephen Lawrence..... .....$ 75
Susan Fielding..... ... 75
A Woman of Fashion..... $ 75
Archie Lovell..... 75

## Ernest Renan's French Works.

The Life of Jesus. Translated...$1 75
Lives of the Apostles. Do. ... 1 75
The Life of St. Paul. Translated.$1 75
The Bible in India—By Jacolliot.. 2 00

## G. W. Carleton.

Our Artist in Cuba, Peru, Spain and Algiers—150 Caricatures of Travel.....$1 00

## M. M. Pomeroy (Brick).

Sense. A serious book..... ....$1 50
Gold Dust. Do. ..... 1 50
Our Saturday Nights..... 1 50
Nonsense. (A comic book).....$1 50
Brick-dust. Do. ..... 1 50
Home Harmonies..... 1 50

## Miscellaneous Works.

The Children's Fairy Geography—With hundreds of beautiful illustrations..$1 75
Carleton's Popular Readings—Edited by Anna Randall Diehl. 2 vols., each 1 50
Laus Veneris, and other Poems—By Algernon Charles Swinburne..... 1 50
Sawed-off Sketches—Comic book by "Detroit Free Press Man." Illustrated.. 1 50
Hawk-eye Sketches—Comic book by "Burlington Hawkeye Man." Do. .. 1 50
Naughty Girl's Diary—By the author of "A Bad Boy's Diary." Do. .. 1 00
The Culprit Fay—Joseph Rodman Drake's Poem. With 100 illustrations..... 2 00
L'Assommoir—An English Translation from Zola's famous French novel..... ..1 00
Parlor Amusements—Games, Tricks, Home Amusements, by Frank Bellew... 1 00
Love [L'Amour]—English Translation from Michelet's famous French work... 1 50
Woman [La Femme]—The Sequel to "L'Amour" Do. Do. ... 1 50
Verdant Green—A racy English college story. With 200 comic illustrations.... 1 50
Clear Light from the Spirit World—By Kate Irving..... 1 25
Bottom Facts Concerning Spiritualism—By John W. Truesdell..... .. 1 50
Why Wife and I Quarreled—Poem by the author of "Betsey and I are Out" 1 00
A Northern Governess at the Sunny South—By Professor J. H. Ingraham. 1 50
Birds of a Feather Flock Together—By Edward A. Sothern, the actor..... 1 00
Yachtman's Primer—Correct Instructions for Amateur Sailors. By Warren.. 50
Longfellow's Home Life—By Blanche Roosevelt Machetta. Illustrated.... 1 50
Redbird's Christmas Story—An Illustrated Juvenile. By Mary J. Holmes .. 50
Every-Day Home Advice—For Household and Domestic Economy.... 1 50
Ladies' and Gentlemen's Etiquette Book of the best Fashionable Society.. 1 00
Love and Marriage—A book for unmarried people. By Frederick Saunders. 1 00
Under the Rose—A Capital book, by the author of "Last Lynne."..... 1 00
So Dear a Dream—A novel by Miss Grant, author of "The Sun Maid."..... 1 00
Give me thine Heart—A capital new domestic Love Story by Roe..... .. 1 00
Meeting Her Fate—A charming novel by the author of "Aurora Floyd."..... 1 00
Faithful to the End—A delightful domestic novel by Roe ..... .. .. .. 1 00
So True a Love—A novel by Miss Grant, author of "The Sun Maid." ..... 1 00

## Humorous Works.

Abijah Beanpole in New York..$ 50
Never—Companion to "Don't.".. 25
Always—By author of "Never."..25
Stop—By author of "Never."..... 25
The Fall of Man—A satire..... 50
Chronicles of Gotham—A satire.. 25
The Comic Liar—By Alden..... 1 50
Cats, Cooks, etc.—By E. T. Ely.. 50
West India Pickles. W. P. Talboys.$1 00
Bad Boy's Reader—Frank Bellew. 10
Store Drumming as a Fine Art. 50
Mrs. Spriggins—By Widow Bedott. 1 50
Phemie Frost—Ann S. Stephens.. 1 50
That Awful Boy—N. Y. Weekly.. 50
That Bridget of Ours. Do. .. 50
Orpheus C. Kerr—Four vols. in one. 2 00

## Miscellaneous Works.

Dawn to Noon—By Violet Fane...$1 50
Constance's Fate. Do. ... 1 50
French Love Songs—Translated. 50
Lion Jack—By P. T. Barnum..... 1 50
Jack in the Jungle. Do. .... 1 50
How to Win in Wall Street.... 50
The Life of Sarah Bernhardt.... 25
Arctic Travels—By Dr. Hayes.... 1 50
Whist for Beginners..... ..... 25
Flashes from "Ouida."..... 1 25
Lady Blake's Love Letters..... 25
Lone Ranch—By Mayne Reid.... 1 50
The Train Boy—Horatio Alger.... 1 25
Dan, The Detective. Do. .... 1 25
Gospels in Poetry—E. H. Kimball.$1 50
Me—By Mrs. Spencer W. Coe..... 50
Don Quixote. Illustrated..... 1 00
Arabian Nights. Do. ..... 1 00
Robinson Crusoe. Do. ..... 1 00
Swiss Family Robinson—Illus.. 1 00
Debatable Land—R. Dale Owen.. 2 00
Threading My Way. Do. .. 1 50
Spiritualism—By D. D. Home.... 2 00
Fanny Fern Memorials—Parton. 2 00
Northern Ballads—E. L. Anderson 1 00
Offenbach's Tour in America.... 1 50
Stories about Doctors—Jeffreson. 1 50
Stories about Lawyers. Do. 1 50

## Miscellaneous Novels.

Doctor Antonio—By Ruffini.....$1 50
Beatrice Cenci—From the Italian. 1 50
Madame—By Frank Lee Benedict. 1 50
A Late Remorse. Do. 1 50
Hammer and Anvil. Do. 1 50
Her Friend Laurence. Do. 1 50
Prairie Flower—Emerson Bennett. 1 50
Jessica—By Mrs. W. H. White ... 1 50
Women of To-Day. Do. .... 1 50
The Baroness—Joaquin Miller.... 1 50
One Fair Woman. Do. .... 1 50
The Burnhams—Mrs. G. E. Stewart 2 00
Eugene Ridgewood—Paul James 1 50
Braxton's Bar—R. M. Daggett... 1 50
Miss Beck—By Tilbury Holt..... 1 50
Sub Rosa—By Chas. T. Murray... 50
Hilda and I—Mrs. Bedell Benjamin 1 50
A College Widow—C. H. Seymour 1 50
Shiftless Folks—Fannie Smith.... 1 50
Peace Pelican. Do. .... 1 50
Price of a Life—R. Forbes Sturgis. 1 50
Hidden Power—T. H. Tibbles.... 1 50
Two of Us—Calista Halsey. ..... 75
Cupid on Crutches—A. B. Wood. 75
Parson Thorne—E. M. Buckingham 1 50
Marston Hall—L. Ella Byrd..... 1 50
Errors—By Ruth Carter .... ..... 1 50
Unmistakable Flirtation—Garner 75
Wild Oats—Florence Marryatt ... 1 50
Widow Cherry—B. L. Farjeon... 25
Solomon Isaacs. Do. ... 50
Doctor Mortimer—Fannie Bean.. 1 50
Two Brides—Bernard O'Reilly... 1 50
Vesta Vane—L. King, R ..... 1 50
Louise and I—By Chas. Dodge... 1 50
My Queen—By Sandette. ..... 1 50
Fallen among Thieves—Rayne.. 1 50
Saint Leger—Richard K. Kimball.$1 75
Was He Successful? Do. 1 75
Undercurrents of Wall St. Do. 1 75
Romance of Student Life. Do. 1 75
To-day. Do. 1 75
Life in San Domingo. Do. 1 75
Henry Powers, Banker. Do. 1 75
Led Astray—By Octave Feuillet.. 1 50
She Loved Him Madly—Borys.. 1 50
Thick and Thin—Mery ... ..... 1 50
So Fair yet False—Chavette..... 1 50
A Fatal Passion—C. Bernard.... 1 50
Marguerite's Journal—For Girls. 1 50
Rose of Memphis—W. C. Falkner. 1 50
Spell-Bound—Alexandre Dumas.. 75
Purple and Fine Linen—Fawcett. 1 50
Pauline's Trial—L. D. Courtney. 1 50
The Forgiving Kiss—M. Loth.... 1 75
Loyal unto Death..... ..... 1 50
Charette—An American novel..... 1 50
Fairfax—By John Esten Cooke.... 1 50
Hilt to Hilt. Do. .... 1 50
Out of the Foam. Do. .... 1 50
Hammer and Rapier. Do. .... 1 50
Kenneth—By Miss Sallie A. Brock. 1 75
Heart Hungry. Mrs. Westmoreland 1 50
Clifford Troupe. Do. 1 50
Silcott Mill—Maria D. Deslonde.. 1 50
John Maribel. Do. .. 1 50
Conquered—By a New Author.... 1 50
Tales from the Popular Operas. 1 50
Edith Murray—Joanna Mathews. 1 50
San Miniato—Mrs. C. V. Hamilton. 1 00
All for Her—A Tale of New York. 1 50
All for Him—Author "All for Her." 1 50
For Each Other. Do. 1 50
Walworth's Novels—Six vols.... 1 75

# POPULAR NEW BOOKS.

## "NEW YORK WEEKLY" SERIES.

Messrs. Street & Smith, publishers of *The New York Weekly*, having been requested by their readers to issue their best and most popular Stories in Book Form, have consented, and have now made arrangements for such publications with the well-known New York House of

## G. W. CARLETON & CO., Publishers.

The intention is to issue in Book Form such Novels, Stories, Humorous Writings, etc., as have run through the *The New York Weekly*, and have proved to be the most popular. Thus the millions of *New York Weekly* readers, who have been particularly pleased and delighted with certain stories in the Paper, and who would like to have them in Book Form for preservation and re-reading, will have an opportunity to buy such works, and gradually form a beautiful

## LIBRARY OF CHOICE BOOKS,

the very cream of the contributions to *The New York Weekly*.

*The volumes already published are as follows:*

**Thrown on the World.**—A Novel, by BERTHA M. CLAY.
**Peerless Cathleen.**—A Novel, by CORA AGNEW.
**Faithful Margaret.**—A Novel, by ANNIE ASHMORE.
**Nick Whiffles.**—A Novel, by DR. J. H. ROBINSON.
**Lady Leonora.**—A Novel, by CARRIE CONKLIN.
**Charity Grinder Papers.**—By MARY KYLE DALLAS.
**A Bitter Atonement.**—A Novel, by BERTHA M. CLAY.
**Curse of Everleigh.**—By HELEN CORWIN PIERCE.
**Love Works Wonders.**—A Novel, by BERTHA M. CLAY.
**Evelyn's Folly.**—A Novel, by BERTHA M. CLAY.
**Lady Damer's Secret.**—A Novel, by BERTHA M. CLAY.
**A Woman's Temptation.**—A Novel, by BERTHA M. CLAY.
**Brownie's Triumph.**—A Novel, by Mrs. GEORGIE SHELDON.
**Reponted at Leisure.**—A Novel, by BERTHA M. CLAY.
**Forsaken Bride.**—A Novel, by Mrs. GEORGIE SHELDON.
**Between Two Loves.**—A Novel, by BERTHA M. CLAY.
**His Other Wife.**—A Novel, by ROSE ASHLEIGH.
**Earle Wayne's Nobility.**—By Mrs. GEORGIE SHELDON.
**A Struggle For a Ring.**—A Novel, by BERTHA M. CLAY.
**Lost—A Pearle.**—By Mrs. GEORGIE SHELDON.
**Young Mrs. Charnleigh.**—A Novel, by T. W. HANSHEW.
**Love's Perils.**—A Novel, by BERTHA M. CLAY.

☞ Sold by Booksellers everywhere—and sent by mail, *postage free*, on receipt of price, $1.50 each, by

G. W. CARLETON & CO., Publishers, Madison Square, New York.

# MRS. MARY J. HOLMES' WORKS.

| | |
|---|---|
| TEMPEST AND SUNSHINE. | DARKNESS AND DAYLIGHT. |
| ENGLISH ORPHANS. | HUGH WORTHINGTON. |
| HOMESTEAD ON HILLSIDE. | CAMERON PRIDE. |
| 'LENA RIVERS. | ROSE MATHER. |
| MEADOW BROOK. | ETHELYN'S MISTAKE. |
| DORA DEANE. | MILLBANK. |
| COUSIN MAUDE. | EDNA BROWNING. |
| MARIAN GREY. | WEST LAWN. |
| EDITH LYLE. | MILDRED. |
| DAISY THORNTON. *(New).* | FORREST HOUSE. *(New).* |

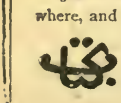
## OPINIONS OF THE PRESS.

"Mrs. Holmes' stories are universally read. Her admirers are numberless. She is in many respects without a rival in the world of fiction. Her characters are always life-like, and she makes them talk and act like human beings, subject to the same emotions, swayed by the same passions, and actuated by the same motives which are common among men and women of every day existence. Mrs. Holmes is very happy in portraying domestic life. Old and young peruse her stories with great delight, for she writes in a style that all can comprehend."—*New York Weekly.*

**The North American Review**, vol. 81, page 557, says of Mrs. Mary J. Holmes' novel, "English Orphans":—"With this novel of Mrs. Holmes' we have been charmed, and so have a pretty numerous circle of discriminating readers to whom we have lent it. The characterization is exquisite, especially so far as concerns rural and village life, of which there are some pictures that deserve to be hung up in perpetual memory of types of humanity fast becoming extinct The dialogues are generally brief, pointed, and appropriate. The plot seems simple, so easily and naturally is it developed and consummated. Moreover, the story thus gracefully constructed and written, inculcates without obtruding, not only pure Christian morality in general, but, with especial point and power, the dependence of true success on character, and of true respectability on merit."

"Mrs. Holmes' stories are all of a domestic character, and their interest therefore, is not so intense as if they were more highly seasoned with sensationalism, but it is of a healthy and abiding character. Almost any new book which her publisher might choose to announce from her pen would get an immediate and general reading. The interest in her tales begins at once, and is maintained to the close. Her sentiments are so sound, her sympathies so warm and ready, and her knowledge of manners, character, and the varied incidents of ordinary life is so thorough, that she would find it difficult to write any other than an excellent tale if she were to try it."—*Boston Banner.*

☞ The volumes are all handsomely printed and bound in cloth, sold everywhere, and sent by mail, *postage free*, on receipt of price [$1.50 each], by



G. W. CARLETON & CO., Publishers,
*Madison Square, New York.*

# A VALUABLE NEW BOOK

*That should be on every Scholar's Table.*

## CARLETON'S HAND-BOOK
—OF—
## POPULAR QUOTATIONS.

A book of *Ready Reference* for such phrases, extracts and Familiar Quotations from popular authors, as are oftenest met with in general literature; together with their authorship and position in the original. Embracing, also, the best list of quotations from foreign languages ever published. Elegantly printed and bound. Price, $1.50.

If you want to *find* any Familiar Quotation, appropriate to any particular Subject or Sentiment—this book will give it to you.

If you want to know who is the author, and *where* any particular Familiar Quotation comes from—this book will tell you.

If you remember *part* of a Familiar Quotation and want to know the whole of it, and know it *exactly*—this book will tell you.

If you want to know the exact meaning and correctness of any Latin, French or Familiar Quotation, in any *Foreign language*—this book will tell you.

If you simply want a delightful book to have lying upon your table, convenient to pick up and entertain you with charming and Familiar thoughts and Quotations of all authors—this is the book that will exactly suit you. * * * There's none more fascinating in the English language.

*** The demand for this remarkable work is enormous. The publishers can hardly print them fast enough. They are for sale by every bookseller, and will be sent by mail, *postage free*, on receipt of the price, $1.50, by

G. W. CARLETON & CO., Publishers,
*Madison Square, New York.*

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
A 000 126 438 1